Alias Grace

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

Margaret Atwood grew up in Ontario and Quebec. She received her bachelor's degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her master's degree from Radcliffe College. Though these days she is best known for her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood is also an author of poetry and critical essays, in addition to fiction. Five of Atwood's novels have been shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize, including *Alias Grace*; Atwood won the prize in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. Described by author Junot Díaz as one of Canada's two global superstars (along with rapper Drake), Atwood currently resides in Toronto with her partner, Graeme Gibson. The couple has a daughter, Jess.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Alias Grace is based on the mysterious real-life murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery. Both James McDermott and Grace Marks were also real people and their fates (death by hanging and imprisonment followed by release, respectively) are faithfully depicted in the novel. When the murders took place in 1843, Canadian society was still feeling the aftershocks of the 1837 Rebellion in Upper Canada (modern-day Ontario). The rebellion was led by Scottish-born politician William Lyon Mackenzie. Mackenzie and his followers, many of whom were farmers, were frustrated by the elite ruling class (derisively known as the Family Compact) and angered over the favoritism that they saw in the government's land-granting policies. The major clash of the rebellion occurred in early December at Montgomery's Tavern in Toronto. The rebels were ultimately beaten, and Mackenzie fled to the United States, where he lived in exile for ten years. Mackenzie eventually received a governmental pardon and returned to Canada, where he continued to work in politics and speak out in favor of a free democratic society. Also important to the novel is the evolution of (pseudo) science during the nineteenth century. Atwood explains much of this context in her afterward to the novel. Three important movements are: Spiritualism, which originated in Upstate New York in the 1840s; Mesmerism, which was discredited as responsible science in the early 1800s; and neuro-hypnotism, which was essentially a resurgence of mesmerism that gained momentum in the later part of the century. The novel also deals on a broader level with the growing interest during the nineteenth century in the nature of the mind and mental illness, dreams, and dissociative personalities (known at the time as dédoublement). Finally, though it does not play a major role in the novel, Grace's identity as an Irish woman is important to understand in a historical context. "The Irish Question"—which refers to the long struggle for Irish independence, met with decades of British resistance—impacted societal perceptions of Irish immigrants to Canada, which was still a British colony. Grace's Irish identity is used to portray her in a negative light at her trial, though her Protestant (rather than Catholic) background spares her from more intense forms of discrimination.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853) features in the epigraphs of *Alias Grace* and in the actual plot of the novel. Moodie was an English woman who settled in Canada and wrote several novels and memoirs about her experience as a settler. Moodie wrote about the Kinnear-Montgomery murders in *Life in the Clearings* and reported that she visited Grace Marks in the prison where she was held. Later research revealed that Moodie had exaggerated many of the details she published about Grace Marks. Another work that features in Alias Grace is Sir Walter Scott's narrative poem *Lady of the Lake*. This poem, which takes its name from a character in the legend of King Arthur, was published in 1810 and, in addition to achieving immense popularity, served as a catalyst for the Highland Revival, a Scottish literary movement that was itself part of the broader Romantic movement. In Atwood's novel, Mary Whitney steals a copy of Scott's poem and reads it with Grace Marks.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Alias Grace*
- **When Published:** 1996
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Historical fiction
- **Setting:** Kingston, Richmond Hill, and Toronto (Ontario)
- **Climax:** When Jerome DuPont (Jeremiah the peddler) hypnotizes Grace, and Mary Whitney's voice announces that she has been possessing Grace intermittently
- **Antagonist:** Though Grace may be a murderess, Atwood portrays her in a sympathetic light. The truly antagonistic forces in the novel are the men who exploit and even abuse Grace—including the prison guards, Dr. Bannerling, James McDermott, and arguably both Mr. Kinnear and Dr. Jordan.
- **Point of View:** The novel shifts between chapters narrated in the first person by Grace, and chapters narrated in the close third person, which focus on Dr. Jordan. Some of the chapters consist of letters exchanged between various characters, primarily Dr. Jordan.

EXTRA CREDIT

Stepping Inside the Book. Alias Grace Park is located in Richmond Hill, Ontario, near where the 1843 murders took place. The park includes a playground and sculptures that reflect the imagery of Atwood's novel. Quilt patterns, which Atwood uses as titles for the fifteen sections of the novel, are also sandblasted into the pavement of the park.

Technology Wizard. In addition to being a prize-winning author, Margaret Atwood is also the developer of a technology called the LongPen, which allows authors to remotely give book talks and sign books. The LongPen is made of two terminals, each consisting of a screen, webcam, microphone, and speakers. The sending terminal also has a tablet, which records the author's pen strokes. The receiving terminal has a robotic hand that reproduces these strokes, thus autographing a book.

PLOT SUMMARY

Inspired by actual historical events, *Alias Grace* follows the story of convicted murderess Grace Marks. Born in Ireland, Grace immigrated to Canada at age twelve, along with her parents and siblings. Grace's mother died on the journey and was buried at sea, a deep loss that Grace is still grieving in adulthood, and Grace's father was an abusive alcoholic. Shortly after immigrating to Canada, Grace left her family to find work as a servant. While working at the house of Mrs. Alderman Parkinson, Grace befriended a fellow servant named Mary Whitney and was devastated when Mary died of complications from an abortion. After Mary's death, a depressed Grace ultimately takes work at the home of Mr. Thomas Kinnear in Richmond Hill (today, a suburb of Toronto). Grace had a tense relationship with Nancy Montgomery, the housekeeper and Mr. Kinnear's paramour, and with James McDermott, a hired hand at the household; however, she was on friendly terms with Jamie Walsh, a boy from a neighboring family, and Jeremiah the peddler, a traveling salesman. In 1843, when Grace was sixteen, Mr. Kinnear and Nancy were murdered under brutal yet mysterious circumstances. Grace and McDermott were both arrested and tried in the murder of Thomas Kinnear. McDermott was convicted and Grace was deemed guilty as an accessory to murder; since McDermott and Grace were convicted, the Montgomery murder was never tried. McDermott was hanged but Grace's sentence was commuted to life in prison.

By the time the novel begins, in 1859, Grace has been in prison for over a decade, having also spent some time in an insane asylum. She claims to have no memory of the day the murders took place, though she remembers the days leading up to and after the murders. Though she remains imprisoned, Grace works at the Governor's house several days a week, where she helps the Governor's wife with sewing. The Governor's wife is part of a group of people, led by a Reverend Verringer, who are working to obtain a federal pardon on Grace's behalf. In an effort to strengthen his committee's argument for a pardon, Reverend Verringer enlists the help of Dr. Simon Jordan, an American, Harvard-educated doctor with dreams of opening his own privately-funded mental asylum. Dr. Jordan begins interviewing Grace on a regular basis, hoping that allowing her to narrate her life story will help call up her lost memory of the murders. At the same time that he is conducting his interviews with Grace, Dr. Jordan guiltily begins an affair with his landlady, Mrs. Rachel Humphrey, whose husband, Major C. D. Humphrey, has abandoned her.

As Grace comes to the end of her story, Dr. Jordan begins to panic because he still cannot determine whether or not she is guilty. After speaking to the lawyer who represented Grace, Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie, and visiting Mr. Kinnear's home in Richmond Hill, Dr. Jordan agrees to allow Dr. Jerome DuPont, a friend of Reverend Verringer's (whom Grace recognizes as Jeremiah the peddler in disguise), hypnotize Grace. During the hypnosis, Grace begins speaking in Mary Whitney's voice. Mary Whitney admits to possessing Grace and killing Nancy, accounting for Grace's lack of memory about the murders and several "sleepwalking" spells that Grace had had since Mary died.

Dr. Jordan realizes that he is trapped. He cannot write a report detailing the hypnosis session because he will be seen as a quack and his dreams of opening his own asylum will be quashed. He also knows that Reverend Verringer will not let him off without writing a report on behalf of the Committee. Panicked about his situation, and distressed by his many interviews with Grace, Dr. Jordan persuades Rachel Humphrey that he is ill and needs her to fetch him a doctor. While she is gone, Dr. Jordan escapes back to the States on a train.

Dr. Jordan becomes tacitly engaged to a woman his mother picks out for him. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Dr. Jordan enlists as a military surgeon. He sustains a head injury and, according to his mother, loses his memory of his time in Canada. However, despite his claim to not remember treating Grace, Mrs. Jordan admits that her son mistakenly refers to his betrothed as Grace.

After twenty-eight years of imprisonment, Grace receives a pardon in 1872. She is transported to Ithaca, New York, where she marries Jamie Walsh, now a widower. At the close of the novel, Grace is on the verge of her forty-sixth birthday. She suspects she is pregnant—though she admits it might also be menopause or a tumor, like the one that killed her mother, saying, "It is strange to know you carry within yourself either a life or a death, but not to know which one."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Grace Marks – Grace, the novel's protagonist, is an Irish immigrant to Canada who, while working in the home of Mr. Thomas Kinnear, participates in murdering him and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery. For much of the novel, Grace narrates her story from prison, but she is ultimately pardoned and released. Though she is the only character in the novel to narrate in the first-person, Grace is nevertheless an incredibly difficult character to understand. Her motives are rarely clear, and it is hard to determine whether the account she gives is a trustworthy one. Nevertheless, the way Atwood renders Grace makes her a sympathetic character, allowing the reader to see her as a person, rather than as a monster. One of the key mysteries of Grace's character is her sexuality. This question is central to her trial, where she is depicted not only as James McDermott's co-conspirator, but also as his lover. Grace's multiple experiences of sexual abuse—at the hands of doctors and prison guards, and possibly Mr. Kinnear and her own father—is a source of deep psychological pain, one that Grace has a difficult time articulating. Though there are some hints that Grace may have been attracted to her friend Jeremiah the peddler, there are also several hints throughout the novel that Grace may be a lesbian, and that she was in love with her best friend, Mary Whitney. Grace insists on several occasions that she has no interest in taking a male lover, and even though she marries Jamie Walsh on her release from prison, she does not express interest in the sexual side of their relationship (though, at the end of the novel, she admits she might by pregnant by him). Instead, Grace's intense devotion to Mary—a combination of her love and respect for her during her life, and a deep sense of guilt over her death—suggests that there may have been an aspect of Grace's bond with Mary that surpassed platonic love. Though this possibility is only hinted at in the novel, it is one of the many ways that Atwood manages to render Grace in a compassionate, multidimensional way, making her into a narrator that is at once unreliable and endlessly absorbing.

Dr. Simon Jordan – A young, Harvard-educated American doctor with dreams of opening his own private asylum, Dr. Jordan comes to Kingston to evaluate Grace Marks. Dr. Jordan is genuinely interested in the causes of mental illness, and he is intrigued by the prospect of working with Grace. Over the course of his time interviewing Grace, Dr. Jordan gradually becomes less and less stable. He begins dosing himself with laudanum and starts an affair with his landlady, Rachel Humphrey. Throughout the novel, Dr. Jordan expresses disturbingly misogynistic and objectifying views about women, and he becomes increasingly frustrated by the fact that Grace is a woman who "eludes" him. When he hears word, near the end of the novel, that his mistress' husband, Major Humphrey, is returning imminently, Dr. Jordan flees Kingston, abandoning his affair with Rachel and his interviews with Grace. In the wake of his departure, Dr. Jordan's affair with his landlady is exposed and public opinion about him shifts, with several characters viewing him as lecherous and deceitful, and Grace herself remaining skeptical. Upon his return to his native Massachusetts, Dr. Jordan enlists in the Union Army; he sustains a head wound that causes him, according to his mother, to lose all memory of his time in Kingston and his work with Grace. Like Grace herself, Dr. Jordan is not a reliable narrator. This is significant and even surprising, as Dr. Jordan sets himself up as a rational, all-knowing counterpart to Grace, whom he views as mysterious and secretive. Dr. Jordan's unraveling emphasizes the fact that even people whom society readily accepts as sane and upstanding have things to hide, including, as is the case for Dr. Jordan, deep-rooted prejudices and unconventional, compulsive sexual urges.

Mary Whitney – Mary is Grace's dearest friend. The two meet when Grace begins work at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's, where Mary is also a servant. Mary, who is several years older than Grace, takes Grace under her wing and teaches her the life of a servant. Mary is mischievous, lively, and funny. A native-born Canadian, she has a coarse way of speaking and passionately believes in the equality of people, regardless of their class status. Grace is incredibly close to Mary; in fact, there are several hints throughout the novel that Grace might be a lesbian, and that she was in love with Mary. After Mary becomes pregnant by her employer's son, Mr. George Parkinson, she undergoes an abortion and dies from complications of the procedure. At the climax of the novel, when Jeremiah (disguised as Dr. Jerome DuPont) hypnotizes Grace, Mary Whitney's voice reveals that, upon her death, her spirit possessed Grace's body. Mary claims that she has intermittently taken over Grace's body and that she, not Grace, is responsible for murdering Nancy Montgomery. The novel never clarifies whether the reader is meant to believe that Grace has been possessed, or whether it is actually Grace herself who is pretending to have been taken over by Mary's spirit.

Mr. Thomas Kinnear – A Scottish-born gentleman living in Richmond Hill, outside Toronto. Mr. Kinnear has a reputation for seducing his servants, and his flirtatious behavior toward Grace, along with the fact that he and Nancy are lovers, affirms the truth of these rumors. It is never clear, however, whether Mr. Kinnear tried to take advantage of Grace. When Dr. Simon Jordan questions Grace about this, she says Mr. Kinnear took the "usual" liberties a master takes with his servant, and that he was "a kind enough master [...] and liberal when he wished to be." Though he is not depicted in the damning way that Dr. Bannerling is, Mr. Kinnear does come across as creepy—and even vaguely misogynistic—in his treatment of Grace. James McDermott and (to an ambiguous extent) Grace conspire to

murder Mr. Kinnear, and they shoot him at his house before attempting to flee to the United States.

Nancy Montgomery – Nancy is Thomas Kinnear's housekeeper and lover who is murdered by James McDermott and Grace (though Grace's involvement is unclear). At the time of her murder, Nancy was pregnant with a child most likely fathered by Mr. Kinnear. Before working for Mr. Kinnear, Nancy was a servant at a different household; there, she became pregnant by an unknown man and gave birth to a baby that died. The reader only encounters Nancy through Grace's eyes, and Grace describes Nancy as "two-faced"—she can often be friendly and teasing toward Grace, but she is also jealous and short-tempered. Grace has a complex, highly ambiguous relationship with Nancy. She is convinced that Nancy resents the fact that Grace worked in a fancier household (Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's). Though she insists that she cannot remember whether she was complicit in strangling Nancy, Grace definitively recalls hearing the axe blow that felled her. Despite recalling this sound, Grace makes several strange comments about how long it took her to be sure that Nancy was actually dead. These comments could be interpreted either as a sign of Grace's guilty conscience, or an indication that she did not want to *believe* that Nancy was actually dead because she, on some level, cared for her. Grace's complex feelings toward Nancy are unequivocally made more complex by the fact that Grace resents Nancy for "getting away with" the same crime (sex out of wedlock) that ultimately led to Mary Whitney's death.

James McDermott – A hired hand at Mr. Kinnear's who works mostly in the stable. McDermott is a few years older than Grace, and is also an Irish immigrant (though he is Catholic, while Grace is Protestant). Grace describes McDermott as glowering and surly; he consistently makes suggestive comments to her, and he is resentful of having to take orders from Nancy, because she is a woman. Though Grace is painted as McDermott's lover at the trial, according to Grace herself, McDermott was "a madman" who, in addition to murdering Mr. Kinnear and Nancy, tried on more than one occasion to rape Grace. During his life, McDermott was known as a liar, a fact which makes many people, including Kenneth MacKenzie, skeptical of his account of the murders, in which he testifies that Grace strangled Nancy with a handkerchief. McDermott is sentenced to death, and he is furious when he learns that Grace's sentence has been commuted. He dies by hanging.

Jamie Walsh – As a boy, Jamie works running errands for Mr. Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery. Jamie is awkward, shy, and smitten with Grace. He often spends evenings at the Kinnear house playing his flute for Nancy and Grace. At Grace's trial, Jamie testifies against her; he also points out that Grace is wearing one of Nancy's dresses, which, according to both Grace and Kenneth MacKenzie, turns public opinion against Grace and directly leads to her guilty sentence. After Grace receives a pardon and is freed from prison, she is sent to live in Ithaca, New York, where she marries Jamie. Grown-up Jamie is fascinated by Grace's life story and pressures Grace to relive her traumatic experiences by narrating them to him.

Jeremiah the peddler (aka Dr. Jerome DuPont) – A travelling salesman whom Grace meets while working at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's. Jeremiah is one of Grace's few friends, and there are some hints that she might be sexually attracted to him. Jeremiah, a mysterious and nomadic person, tries unsuccessfully to convince Grace to run away with him, and then he resurfaces when Grace is in prison in the guise of Dr. Jerome DuPont, a practitioner of neuro-hypnotism (the reader does not learn that Dr. DuPont and Jeremiah are one and the same until near the end of the novel). Jeremiah is thus the person who performs the hypnosis in which it is "revealed" that Grace has been possessed by the spirit of Mary Whitney. Because Grace feels powerfully drawn to him, it seems possible that Jeremiah and Grace are in cahoots in staging the hypnosis. In a letter Grace writes to Jeremiah toward the end of the novel, after he has left Kingston and adopted a different alias, Grace writes ambiguously: "Why did you want to help me? Was it as a challenge, and to outwit the others, as with the smuggling you used to do; or was it out of affection and fellow-feeling?" This vague passage is the only "proof" that the hypnosis might have been deliberately staged by Jeremiah and Grace. Grace does see Jeremiah once more after she is released from prison; though the encounter is very brief Grace is comforted by the feeling that Jeremiah is someone with whom her secrets will always be safe.

Grace's Mother – In addition to Grace, Grace's mother has eight living children, has given birth to three stillborn infants, and has had one miscarriage. Grace remembers her mother as having "long auburn hair" and "round blue eyes like a doll." Grace's mother is a gentle and vulnerable woman, "a timid creature, hesitating and weak and delicate." Grace says, "I wanted her to be stronger, so I would not have to be so strong myself." Grace's mother dies of an undiagnosed stomach problem (likely a tumor) on the family's sea passage to Canada. Grace is devastated by her mother's death, and blames herself for not properly caring for her body afterwards (she is unable to open a **window** for her mother's soul to fly out of, because her mother dies in the ship's steerage). Even as an adult woman, Grace is haunted by dreams of her mother.

Grace's Father – Born in England, Grace's father is trained as a stonemason, but his crippling alcoholism renders him unable to find a job or provide food for his family. Grace's father physically abuses Grace's mother and, late in the novel, it is obliquely hinted that he may have sexually abused Grace when she was a child. Grace's father is implicated in arson and a murder, which prompts Aunt Pauline and Uncle Roy to encourage Grace's parents to emigrate from Ireland. When Grace begins work as a servant in Canada at the age of twelve,

her father consistently tries to purloin her wages, but after Mary Whitney comes to her defense, Grace never sees her father again.

Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie – Grace's lawyer in the trial of Mr. Thomas Kinnear's murder. MacKenzie insists that Grace make up a plausible story about the day of the murders, rather than admit that she has no memory of the day, because he believes this will improve her chance of avoiding the death penalty. Though Grace is convicted as an accomplice to Kinnear's murder, MacKenzie succeeds in commuting her sentence from a death sentence to a life in prison. When Dr. Simon Jordan meets with MacKenzie, MacKenzie claims that Grace was in love with him; "a hand placed on hers," he says, "and she would have thrown herself into my arms."

Mrs. Rachel Humphrey – Dr. Simon Jordan's landlady and lover during his stay in Kingston. The reader only meets Rachel through Dr. Jordan's eyes; he describes her as simpering and clingy. According to Dr. Jordan, though Rachel pretends to be reserved and proper she is actually incredibly sexual. Dr. Jordan insists that Rachel initiated their affair, while Dora offers the conflicting perspective that any time Dr. Jordan looks at Rachel it is "with fearsome blazing eyes like a tiger's, as if ready to spring on her and sink his teeth into her." After Simon abandons her, Rachel writes him several letters; though the reader never sees these letters, Mrs. Jordan's acerbic responses to them make it clear that Rachel believed Simon had promised to marry her.

Major Humphrey – Rachel Humphrey's alcoholic husband who leaves their home near the beginning of the novel. By the time Rachel receives a letter announcing the Major's imminent return, she is already deeply enmeshed in an affair with her tenant, Dr. Simon Jordan. In a letter from Simon's mother, Mrs. Constance Jordan, the reader learns that Major Humphrey never returned to his wife; instead, his body was discovered and he is thought to have died of "prolonged intoxication and the resulting delirium."

Dora – The maid at Rachel Humphrey's house, who also occasionally works in the laundry at the Governor's wife's house. Grace dislikes Dora's taste for gossip. Dora and Dr. Simon Jordan also do not like one another, with Dr. Jordan consistently describing Dora in misogynistic terms. He even "tries imagining [Dora] a prostitute—he often plays this private mental game with various women he encounters—but he can't picture any man actually paying for her services."

Dr. Joseph Workman – Medical superintendent at the Toronto asylum. Dr. Workman began working at the asylum three weeks prior to Grace's departure (and return to the Kingston Penitentiary). Dr. Workman, based on the letter he writes to Dr. Simon Jordan, appears sympathetic and upstanding. He believes that mental illness is the result of a "predisposing condition" and advocates for "gentle treatment" of Grace, whom he says was "a profitable and useful inmate" during their overlapping time at the asylum.

Dr. Samuel Bannerling – Grace's attending doctor during her stay at the Toronto asylum. Dr. Bannerling sexually abused Grace, yet maintains the hypocritical position that neuro-hypnotism (as practiced by Dr. Jerome DuPont) is immoral because it leaves young women vulnerable to sexual advances by sham doctors. Dr. Bannerling is misogynistic and describes Grace as a temptress and a liar.

Dr. Binswanger – A Swiss doctor and mutual acquaintance of Dr. Simon Jordan, Dr. Joseph Workman, and the Reverend Verringer. Dr. Binswanger recommends Dr. Jordan to the Reverend as someone who might be able to make a mental assessment of Grace Marks, thereby aiding in the Reverend's project of securing Grace a pardon.

The Governor's Wife – A woman in her mid-forties, the Governor's wife hosts twice-weekly discussion meetings in her home and is also a member of the committee Reverend Verringer heads, which is working to secure a pardon for Grace. The Governor's wife employs Grace in her home, mostly as a seamstress, and she is kind to Grace. Dr. Simon Jordan describes her as having an "alarmed, slightly pop-eyed look."

Miss Lydia – One of the Governor's wife's two daughters. Lydia is pretty and sweet, and has a crush on Dr. Simon Jordan. Lydia is also captivated by Grace, and is kind to her, although she is also quite thoughtless. For example, when Grace agrees to make her a new dress, Lydia responds that she hopes Grace is never released from prison so she will always be around to help her, which Grace wryly calls "a compliment of a sort."

Mrs. Constance Jordan – Dr. Simon Jordan's mother. Mrs. Jordan complains often of being ill, though she may be a hypochondriac. She is solicitous about her son, to the point of being almost single-minded; ever since Simon's father lost his business, Mrs. Jordan has been increasingly anxious for Simon to make an advantageous marriage.

Mrs. Susanna Moodie – An author, based on a real person. Susanna Moodie never appears in the novel; she is only referenced for having written an exaggerated account of Grace Marks after visiting her in prison and in the asylum. While other characters criticize Moodie for being overly impressionable, Dr. Simon Jordan suspects that many of Moodie's exaggerations originated with Grace's lawyer, Kenneth MacKenzie.

George Parkinson – One of Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's two sons, a student at Harvard College. Though it is never explicitly confirmed, it is strongly suggested that George is the father of Mary Whitney's child. According to Mary, George initially promised her marriage, but reneged on his promise. At Grace's urging later on in Mary's pregnancy, Mary asks George for help. He offers her five dollars, denies the child is his "since [Mary]'d been so obliging with him, that he suspect[s] she [has] been so for others," and suggests that if she can't figure out a solution "she could always drown herself."

Mrs. Phelan – A kind, elderly Catholic whom Grace befriends on her family's sea voyage to Canada. When Grace's mother falls ill, Mrs. Phelan helps Grace care for her younger siblings, since Grace's father is rendered useless by seasickness. Mrs. Phelan introduces Grace to the notion that a **window** should be opened when a person dies, so the person's soul can escape the room; Grace is haunted by this belief for years to come.

Mrs. Burt – The landlady with whom Grace and her family live upon their arrival in Toronto. Mrs. Burt is initially very kind to Grace and her siblings; Grace suspects that Mrs. Burt, herself a widow, is plotting to wed Grace's father. When she realizes her plan will not work, Mrs. Burt becomes a much stricter landlady—however, she does help Grace secure work at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's by introducing her to her friend, Mrs. Honey, who works at the Parkinson house as the housekeeper.

Charley Horse – Mr. Kinnear's horse, of whom Grace is very fond. At different times both Mr. Kinnear and James McDermott express a bizarre jealousy of Charley Horse, whom they feel Grace likes more than either of them. Grace's connection with Charley Horse (and with animals in general, including Mr. Kinnear's cow) highlights how lonely Grace is.

Aunt Pauline – Grace's aunt, older sister to Grace's mother. Aunt Pauline is domineering and disapproving of her sister's marriage. Still, Aunt Pauline is very devoted to her sister and helps to support her nieces and nephews as Grace's father's alcoholism renders his family destitute. Aunt Pauline cautions Grace at a very young age not to follow her mother's example and marry beneath her.

Clarrie – The laundress at the Governor's house. Clarrie is biracial and used to be a slave, before the abolition of slavery in Canada. Clarrie is relatively quiet, but Grace appreciates her company. "She doesn't mind me or care what I may have done," Grace says, "even if I killed a gentleman; she only nods as if to say, So that's one less of them."

MINOR CHARACTERS

Reverend Verringer – A Methodist minister and head of the committee that is working to secure a federal pardon for Grace. The Reverend loyally maintains a belief in Grace's innocence, and he is ultimately successful in obtaining a pardon for her. He is depicted as relatively sympathetic, if slightly self-important, character.

Dr. Edward Murchie – A friend of Dr. Simon Jordan's. Edward and Simon were undergraduates at Harvard together.

Miss Marianne – Miss Lydia's sister.

William P. Jordan – Dr. Simon Jordan's late father.

Mrs. Alderman Parkinson – Grace's first employer. Mrs. Alderman Parkinson is an American, and Grace describes her as "an imposing figure of a woman." Mrs. Alderman Parkinson coddles her son George when he takes ill, and Grace seems to think that she does not suspect her son of impregnating Mary Whitney.

Richard Parkinson – Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's other son, also a Harvard student.

Mrs. Honey – Housekeeper for Mrs. Alderman Parkinson.

Agnes – One of the chambermaids at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's.

Effie – Another chambermaid at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's.

Mrs. Quennell – A friend of the Governor's wife. Mrs. Quennell participates in the Governor's wife's discussion circles, and is a practitioner of Spiritualism, which involves communicating with the dead.

Uncle Roy – Aunt Pauline's husband, a shopkeeper. Uncle Roy pays for the passage of Grace and her entire family from Ireland to Canada.

The Guards – Two unnamed men who escort Grace to and from the Governor's house every day and who both verbally and physically harass her.

Janet – Daughter of the warden who is in charge at the time of Grace's release from prison. Janet helps Grace make a new wardrobe after her release, and also escorts her to the States, where she stands as bridesmaid at Grace's wedding to Jamie Walsh.

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.

STORYTELLING AND POWER

Through Grace's experiences as a prisoner, Atwood explores how societal forces manipulate and control women's abilities to tell their own stories, often through preventing them from speaking. This implicitly points to the power of storytelling—if women were allowed to tell their own stories, then their experiences, ideas, and ambitions would define them, rather than the diminished personhood given to them by men. Grace's experiences show not only that storytelling is a vital way to communicate truth and fight back against violence and falsehood, but also that storytelling is a fundamental mechanism by which human beings process and understand their own experiences. Through telling her story, Grace learns to understand and bear the burdens of what has happened to her, even if she can't fully convince others of the truth as she understands it.

Everything about Grace's life as a prisoner is controlled,

including the way she uses spoken language. In the asylum, Grace says, the matrons "would provoke us, especially right before the visitors were to come" in order "to show how dangerous we were." Tired of having her own speech turned against her and used as evidence of her mental instability, Grace stops speaking altogether, not breaking her silence even when the doctor overseeing her case, Dr. Bannerling, sexually abuses her. In the prison, Grace and the other inmates are not allowed to speak when they are taking meals, but Grace says that the women "sit chewing their bread with their **mouths** open and slurping their tea in order to make a noise of some sort even if not speech." This detail shows how vital spoken language is to the human experience. Indeed, speech becomes a kind of survival tactic for Grace, who is so often left alone and in silence that she even speaks to her daydreams, asking them to talk to her. Clearly, Grace experiences deep pain as a result of having her speech manipulated and even prohibited by the institution of the prison.

Given that Grace is not allowed to fully exercise her right to spoken language, it is even more vital that she be allowed to tell her story in writing. Grace is acutely aware of the power of the written word, as public opinion about her was shaped by the facts of her case that were published in the newspaper. In her interviews with Simon Jordan, Grace often takes care to point out details that the papers have gotten wrong about her story, such as when she says, "We went to the nearest tavern, which was not a hotel at all, as was said in the broadsheet poem about me, but only a cheap inn by the wharf." Grace's meticulousness about details that might otherwise seem unimportant or even irrelevant shows how important it is to her to have a feeling of control over her story, which has always been narrated by others.

Details matter, Atwood argues, for once a person loses the power to decide which details are important, their story is at risk of being manipulated. An example of this is Grace's description of the regiment in which James McDermott used to serve, "which," she says, "had got such a bad reputation among the farmers, as I knew from Mary Whitney, having burnt a good many farmhouses during the Rebellion, and turned women and children out into the snow, and done worse to them besides, that was never printed in the papers." The fact that this regiment was responsible for raping women and girls is a vital detail, yet it goes unstated, making the regiment seem like a band of arsonists, rather than arsonists and rapists. Atwood suggests that, in general, society—particularly men—tend to view details as trivial, even going so far as to code them as feminine. This is hinted at when Grace describes how her lawyer, Kenneth MacKenzie (who also sexually harassed her), was frustrated by the way Grace narrated her story, calling it wandering and incoherent. Dr. Jordan is also mystified by Grace's ability to recall and recount details. As a result of this misogynistic prejudice against details in storytelling, details—and their female authors—are often ignored or rewritten by men. This accounts for Grace's description of herself at her own trial: "I was there in the box of the dock but I might as well have been made of cloth, and stuffed, with a china head; and I was shut up inside that doll of myself, and my true voice could not get out."

Even Dr. Jordan does not correctly interpret Grace's story, though she is narrating it in full directly to him. Grace expresses her misgivings, saying, "I never see what he writes down; and sometimes I imagine that whatever he is writing down, it cannot possibly be anything that has come out of my mouth, as he does not understand much of what I say, although I try to put things as clearly as I can." This suggests that the only chance women have at articulating their own stories—without their language being appropriated or distorted—is if they are able to physically write down their own stories. Even if the person transcribing a woman's story has good intentions, there is, Atwood suggests, an inevitable loss in the transcription process. Grace gestures at this when she says, "The way I understand things, the Bible may have been thought out by God, but it was written down by men. And like everything men write down, such as the newspapers, they got the main story right but some of the details wrong." As women are already socially disempowered and their words are more easily discounted than men's, women are more vulnerable to such distortions.

Atwood also shows that the act of telling a story is vital, not just because of a story's ability to communicate a person's experience to others, but also because storytelling is fundamental to understanding and processing one's own experience. Grace points this out when she says, "When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness [...] It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else." Atwood thus suggests that when women are barred from telling their stories—either out loud, or, even more importantly, in writing—their very ability to make sense of their lives and experiences is at stake.

FEMALE SEXUALITY AND THE NATURE OF WOMEN

A dominant question of Victorian times was whether women were, by nature, good or evil. Atwood takes up this question in the novel, arguing that this binary is not a sufficient way to understand women, just as it would be an insufficient way to understand men. Atwood takes this argument a step further by showing how society's repression of female sexuality—and its willingness to allow, and even condone, sexual violence against women—cements this binary understanding of womanhood and negatively affects women's self-expression by tying their worth to their sexuality.

Toward the beginning of the novel, Grace reflects on the many different characterizations of her that have appeared in print. She has been described as "an inhuman female demon," "an innocent victim of a blackguard," "a good girl with a pliable nature," and "little better than an idiot," among other things. "And I wonder," Grace says, "how can I be all of these different things at once?" This introduces the argument Atwood will develop over the course of the novel: that to understand women categorically—as either a demon or a victim, a good girl or a bad one—robs them of their dignity and their right to have complicated identities. Atwood suggests that Grace's confusion about how she can be "all of these different things at once" stems largely from the fact that society insists on defining her as one thing or another, rather than allowing her to be a complex individual.

Atwood expands on this theme by showing how many different characters liken women to physical objects. Mr. Kinnear tells Grace not to sit in the back of the wagon "like a piece of luggage" and the guards who regularly harass Grace when they escort her from the prison to the Governor's house taunt her with demeaning insults such as, "you're ripe enough to be picked, why stay on the tree untasted, you'll just fall of and rot at the foot of it in any case." Even women reduce other women to objects, such as when a housekeeper says of the dead Mary Whitney, "There is no sense in crying over spilt milk," as if Mary herself, covered in blood on the bed, is the milk. Repeated images of women as objects or foodstuffs underscores Atwood's argument that society's insistence on defining women according to a binary ultimately leads to women being treated as less than human.

Another key component of Atwood's argument in favor of female complexity is her description of a society that is intolerant of a woman expressing sexual desire. When Grace is explaining to Dr. Jordan why she is in the habit of always locking her bedroom door, she says, "Once you are found with a man in your room you are the guilty one, no matter how they get in." This takes a huge toll on women, socially disempowering them and depriving them of their right to explore their sexuality, which is an important part of a person's identity. Atwood also includes many examples of the rampant sexual violence of the Victorian era. Grace is sexually assaulted not only by prison guards, but also by medical doctors in the asylum, and she fights off McDermott when he attempts to rape her. In this, Atwood shows that violence against women as a social epidemic, fed by the concept of women as objects rather than people with their own sexual desires and boundaries.

Perhaps worst of all, Grace seems in some ways to internalize society's attitude towards women and female sexuality, reducing herself to an object when she describes her opinion of whorehouses. She says, "I was indeed curious to see the women who made a living by selling their bodies, because I thought if worst came to worst and if starving, I would still have something to sell." This moment exemplifies how the stifling of women's sexuality furthers the narrative of women (and their bodies) as commodities. Atwood thus presents a powerful argument against defining women according to a binary while simultaneously depriving them the right to their own sexuality. This toxic combination can have deadly consequences, as Atwood clearly underscores in her depiction of Mary Whitney's death due to a botched abortion.

SOCIAL CLASS AND PROPRIETY

Part of Atwood's critique of the rigid class structure of the Victorian era is her exploration of how deeply engrained notions of "proper" behavior were then and how central they were to people's identity. While propriety is certainly influenced by gender, Atwood uses Grace's narration to suggest that proper behavior was often even more determined by class. Atwood thus explores the way that class inexorably shapes her characters' identities, while also providing examples of how characters like Grace subtly redefine the social norms that bind them.

Grace understands her relation to others according to their relative class statuses. For example, the tension between Grace and Nancy Montgomery arose from class differences, rather than from romantic rivalry, as the newspapers have convinced people. For the most part, Grace buys into the class hierarchy of her society. She disapproves of Nancy's relationship with Mr. Kinnear because she feels it violates class distinctions: Nancy is at once acting above her station, by romancing a gentleman, and below it, by taking on tasks that Grace feels shouldn't fall to her. This can be seen when Nancy insists on taking Mr. Kinnear his coffee and Grace thinks, "I was surprised, and said that at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's, the housekeeper would never have thought of carrying a tea tray up the stairs, as it was beneath her position and a job for the maids." By showing that Grace has a deep sense of class consciousness and is able to articulate it—even if she is not very critical of the class system itself—Atwood shows that she is much more intelligent and savvy than the newspapers have made her out to be.

Though Grace's understanding of class is, for the most part, conventional, Atwood also shows how Grace subverts the class hierarchy in a unique way. Though the prison guards technically hold a higher place in society than she does as a convicted murderer, Grace describes the prison guards who consistently harass and assault her as "a low class of person." She also consistently makes snide comments about class, such as, "People dressed in a certain kind of **clothing** are never wrong." This comment gestures toward the fact that people of the upper class have a much easier time imposing their opinions on others—and that they can easily deflect both criticism and punishment by virtue of their economic and social clout in society. Atwood thus depicts Grace as being aware of the limits

and inequities of the class system, even as she largely buys into this system.

While Grace largely accepts class norms, Mary Whitney becomes the vessel for Atwood's class critique, dismantling the illusion of the upper class being superior. Grace recalls Mary's advice: "If I was ever to be a chambermaid, I would have to learn to carry a bucket of filth as if it was a bowl of roses, for the thing these people hated the most was to be reminded that they too had bodies, and their shit stank as much as anyone's, if not worse." In contrast to her upper class counterparts, Mary is heavily associated with bodily experience. Not only does Mary teach Grace about menstruation, but she more symbolically represents the idea of embodiment via her favorite game, in which she would hide amongst the laundry line and "press up against them so there was the outline of her face, and give out a moaning sound" in order to scare Grace. Atwood depicts Mary as a self-assured person squeezing joy out of her mundane life, but she also clearly shows how Mary's embrace of her bodily experience represents a violation of the social code. Mary suffers the ultimate punishment for her indiscretion: she dies from a botched abortion.

Mary also subverts class norms via her understanding of the relative power of the upper and lower classes. She explains to Grace that fancy homes have two staircases not so the servants can be out of the way of their employers, but vice versa—so that "[the family] could go traipsing up and down the front stairs in their fancy clothes and trinkets, while the real work of the place went on behind their backs." Mary also tells Grace that servants have the upper hand over their employers "because we washed their dirty linen and therefore we knew a good deal about them; but they did not wash ours, and knew nothing about us at all." While Atwood never explicitly endorses Mary's opinion of her own power, she emphasizes how much Grace knows about how to get along in the world—from her sewing expertise to everyday practical knowledge, such as the impossibility of making butter when there is a thunderstorm. Atwood contrasts Grace's vast and varied practical knowledge with Dr. Jordan's helplessness in caring for himself, such as when he goes to market in lieu of his sick landlady and is clueless about how to procure food: "This is a universe he has never explored, having had no curiosity about where his food came from, as long as it did come." These examples, in addition to being inherently gendered, emphasize the upper class' extreme dependence on their servants; Atwood thus imbues servants like Grace with a substantial amount of power, even if it is not quite as much as Mary Whitney imagines for herself.

Atwood makes a nuanced argument about class, emphasizing how notions of propriety—acting according to one's class status—are deeply comforting to Grace, even as they ostensibly limit her. At the same time, Atwood also gives voice to the way that characters like Grace, and more obviously Mary Whitney, quietly critique or invert the social codes of class behavior, even as they continue to live their lives according to these codes.

TRUTH, MEMORY, AND MADNESS

Dr. Jordan's mission is to learn the truth about Grace's role in the Kinnear and Montgomery murders by helping Grace to recover her memories of the day the murders took place. By reading the novel, the reader becomes party to this truth-seeking project, attempting, along with Dr. Jordan, to determine which of the three accounts Grace has given of the murders is the true one. However, Atwood consistently challenges the idea that there could be a single true narrative of the murders—or indeed that objective truth, as a concept, really exists. Instead, she highlights the way that characters' sense of emotional truth often outweighs their commitment to an accurate representation of events or facts.

For example, after Grace's friend Mary Whitney dies of a botched abortion, their employer questions Grace about the identity of Mary's lover and Grace responds that Mary had asked her not to reveal it. "Mary had not said this," Grace clarifies, "but I had my own suspicions." Here, Grace is clearly comfortable telling what is factually a lie in order to preserve Mary's propriety. Perhaps more significantly, this lie also helps protect Grace; by maintaining that her silence is in service to a friend, Grace expiates herself from having to reveal her suspicions about Mary's lover to her employer. Moments later, however, Grace becomes agitated when the housekeeper makes up an alternate explanation for Mary's death—a fever, rather than an abortion gone awry. "And all the time," Grace says, "Mary was there on the bed, listening to us, and hearing about our plans to tell these lies about her; and I thought, She will not be easy in her mind about it." Clearly this lie is also one that will protect Mary's propriety—yet Grace feels conflicted about it because she imagines that it would have greatly offended Mary, perhaps since Mary's bold personality and her confidence in her own body might have led her to own up to her pregnancy and abortion, had she survived. Thus, while Grace's earlier lie that Mary asked her not to reveal the father's identity is emotionally true to the friendship between Mary and Grace, the lie that Mary died of a fever is, at least to Grace's mind, not emotionally true to the fiery person that Mary was. Through these and other examples, Atwood suggests that what characters believe to be true often has more to do with what "feels" true to them, than what "actually" occurred. Atwood does not pronounce judgment on this phenomenon, instead depicting it as an inevitable human tendency.

Further undermining the notion of objective truth, Atwood insists on the inherently malleable nature of memory. This is clear in Grace's contemplation of the role of a keepsake book, in which women of the Victorian era collected mementos. "What should a Keepsake Album be?" she wonders. "Should it be only the good things in your life, or should it be all of the things?"

These rhetorical questions suggest that there isn't a correct answer; rather, memories—and thus what we think of as "the truth"—are another kind of story that characters tell themselves.

Finally, Atwood attacks the sexist Victorian notion of associating madness with women, showing that institutions manipulate the definition of sanity in order to disempower and discredit women. Grace *does* faint and hear voices—characteristics stereotypically associated with "mad" women—but Atwood complicates the question of madness by showing that it exists in plenty of other iterations, many of which are ignored by patriarchal society. For example, in describing a woman she knew in the asylum, Grace says, "[she] was in there to get away from her husband, who beat her black and blue, he was the mad one but nobody would lock him up." Atwood even depicts Simon Jordan's incontrollable sexual fantasies and urges as a kind of madness, wryly writing, "He is both sane and normal, and he has developed the rational faculties of his mind to a high degree; and yet he cannot always control such pictures." Atwood further undercuts the association between madness and womanhood by showing how Dr. Jordan unravels as he learns more about Grace's story, ultimately losing all memory of Grace after he is injured in the Civil War. These kinds of male madness are not societally coded as such because the idea of (in)sanity is, Atwood shows, less a measure of an individual's relation to reality than it is a societal construct that is used to empower some people (mostly men) and disempower others. Thus, Atwood's critique of the Victorian concept of female madness is part of her larger argument about the nonexistence of objective truth.

GENDER, OWNERSHIP, AND POWER

Even before she was imprisoned, Grace owned very little. The most important object in her possession, her mother's teapot, was sold off by her father to cover his debts. At Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's home, Grace and Mary are only allowed one candle a week; Mary steals candle-ends from the dining room because one candle a week "was less light than [she] wanted to have." This powerful moment shows that not allowing women to own things is a way for the upper class (and particularly men of that class) to keep women in a subordinate position—to keep them in the darkness, rather than the light, one might say. Grace's increasing efforts to exert ownership throughout the novel show the power that comes with ownership—thus, ownership is Grace's resistance against oppression.

One way that Grace exerts ownership is by using her time deliberately. At the Kinnear house, Grace says, she "liked being early to rise; that way I could pretend for a little while that the house was my own." In prison, where her time is even more rigidly controlled than it was when she was a servant, Grace works hard to maintain ownership of her mind, including her memories and her dreams. Once, when Dr. Jordan pushes her to elaborate on her use of the phrase "and so forth," Grace insists: "And so forth, I say firmly, because And so forth is all he is entitled to. Just because he pesters me to know everything is no reason for me to tell him." Thus, Grace maintains possession over her memories. Grace also takes care to safeguard her dreams—"I have little enough of my own," she says, "no belongings, no possessions, no privacy to speak of, and I need to keep something for myself; and in any case, what use would he have for my dreams, after all?"

At the same time that she shows Grace's efforts to maintain ownership, Atwood carefully depicts the (mostly male) societal forces that are attempting to strip her possessions from her. Through Dr. Jordan, Atwood shows how society has taught men to feel entitled to ownership of women's bodies, both on a personal and a professional level. Of his landlady, Rachel Humphrey, with whom he is having an affair, Dr. Jordan insists, "She wishes to be seduced, overwhelmed, taken against her will." Dr. Jordan feels this claim of ownership in his professional life as a physician, as well. He reflects on his women patients, saying, "To be rendered unconscious; to lie exposed, without shame, at the mercy of others; to be touched, incised, plundered, remade—this is what they are thinking of when they look at him." By showing that societal forces attempt to wrest control from women of their own bodies, Atwood underscores the radical nature of Grace's attempts at ownership—of dreams, memories, even the prison nightgown she takes with her when she is freed—depicting them as emancipatory and subversive acts.

JUSTICE AND RELIGION

The dramatic tension at the heart of *Alias Grace* is whether or not Grace is guilty of killing Nancy, which matters since her guilt determines whether her pardon was just. *Alias Grace* explores the question of justice in both legal and religious terms, with Grace's devout (though not exactly conventional) Christianity playing a key role in how she interprets her life. Through Grace, Atwood explores the nature of a higher power—however, just as she never answers the question of Grace's guilt, Atwood also refuses to provide answers about whether human or divine justice has been served to Grace. If anything, the novel seems to lean toward the nihilistic idea that the most important judgment is the one a person makes of herself, rather than the judgments made of her by others or by God.

Grace is a practicing Christian, well-versed in the Bible and a believer in heaven and hell—though she posits that the gates to these two realms "are located closer together than most people think." Despite her belief in God, Grace also holds many superstitious beliefs, and the question of her guilt is ultimately seriously complicated by her strong sense of fatalism. She recounts for Dr. Jordan a verse she remembers from

childhood—"Needles and pins, needles and pins, / When a man marries his trouble begins"—commenting, "It doesn't say when a woman's trouble begins. Perhaps mine began when I was born." Grace also insists that she dreamt of the murders before they happened, suggesting her belief that the murders were fated to happen and she was fated to be involved in them.

However, Grace's fatalism is complicated by the fact that Grace expresses extreme frustration with society's treatment of women; this frustration, the novel implies, could have served as a motive for Grace to exert her free will and murder Nancy. When she learns of Nancy's pregnancy by Mr. Kinnear she reflects, "It would not be fair and just that [Nancy] should end up a respectable married lady with a ring on her finger, and rich into the bargain. It would not be right at all. Mary Whitney had done the same as her, and had gone to her death. Why should the one be rewarded and the other punished, for the same sin?" This suggests that Grace might have a retributive sense of justice, and that she took justice into her own hands, killing Nancy as a way to balance Mary Whitney's death on the cosmic scales. By imbuing Grace with conflicting views about whether her murder of Nancy was fated or motivated by anger, Atwood is able to consider huge philosophical questions about the nature of human existence without providing any clear-cut answers.

On the question of Grace's guilt, Atwood is similarly ambiguous, though the moment when Grace is on the verge of sleep in the tavern where she will soon be arrested provides the clearest guide. Grace thinks: "It's as if I never existed, because no trace of me remains, I have left no marks. And that way I cannot be followed. It is almost the same as being innocent." This complex statement suggests that, to Grace's mind, living is synonymous, on some level, with sinning. This could account for the fact that Grace does not seem to judge herself too harshly, whether she is guilty or not. Though the novel never explicitly endorses this position, it seems to suggest that Grace's ability to live with herself may be the most important kind of judgment. In the final chapter of the novel Grace admits, "I had a rage in my heart for many years, against Mary Whitney, and especially against Nancy Montgomery; against the two of them both, for letting themselves be done to death in the way that they did, and for leaving me behind with the full weight of it." This striking statement suggests that Grace has an extremely complicated sense of justice, one that cannot be fully accounted for by either human or divine law. Grace's focus—and ultimately the novel's, too—is on the hard work of surviving. Physical and emotional survival by any means necessary ultimately takes greater precedence in the novel than the serving of legal or divine justice.

SYMBOLS

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

CLOTHING

In *Alias Grace*, clothing is a symbol of identity—and particularly of identity's malleability. From a young age, Grace is keenly attuned to the way that clothes not only function as a status symbol, but also mask people's true selves. For example, Grace points out that society at large believes that "people dressed in a certain kind of clothing are never wrong" (she is referencing the doctors who "treated" her at the asylum but also sexually abused her). Grace thus gestures at the way society wrongly associates certain kinds of clothing with authority and morality.

Exchanging clothes with someone is also an important act in the novel. When the two first meet, Mary Whitney lends Grace her nightdress while Grace washes up; when Mary is buried she wears Grace's nightdress, because hers is covered in blood. In this instance, exchanging clothes is a symbol of intimacy, but it also foreshadows Mary and Grace's converging identities at the end of the book. Later in the novel, wearing someone else's clothes becomes a transgressive act—indeed, almost a violent one. This is most clearly seen when Grace dons Nancy's clothes shortly after Nancy is murdered. Grace also insists on wearing Nancy's clothes when she is on trial, which the public interprets as a lack of remorse on Grace's part and also as a status transgression, since Nancy's clothes are nicer than Grace's social class can afford. Finally, Mary Whitney takes the idea of exchanging clothing to an extreme when she claims that, upon her death, she "borrowed [Grace's] clothing," or her "fleshly garment." In this way, changing "clothes" is shown to be a means not only of changing one's social status, but also changing a person's actual identity.

WINDOWS

Somewhat paradoxically, windows in *Alias Grace* are associated with confinement. The windows in the penitentiary are placed high up in the walls so that prisoners cannot see out of them, and when Grace's mother dies on the family's passage to Canada, Mrs. Phelan introduces Grace to the idea that a window should be opened when a person dies so that their soul can escape the room. Grace is devastated by the fact that she could not open a window for her mother, who died in the hold of the ship, and she is even more disturbed by forgetting to open the window of her room at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's after Mary Whitney dies. At the hypnosis near the end of the novel, Mary Whitney's spirit claims to have possessed Grace's body because there was no open window through which she could escape. Grace is haunted by the feeling that she must "open the window," and she has several dreams about windows over the course of the novel, which reflects the constricted nature of Grace's life and choices.

MOUTHS

In *Alias Grace*, mouths are associated with violence, and particularly with the way male-dominated society systematically disempowers women. For example, when Grace's father refers to his children as mouths to feed, young Grace imagines that her pregnant mother's belly is filled with a mouth that is "eating away" at her, suggesting that Grace sees childbearing as destroying women. Grace also has a recurring dream about Nancy Montgomery where the only visible part of Nancy's bloody body is her mouth—and of course, Nancy's murder was plotted in part due to James McDermott's misogyny. The association between mouths and violence against women is not just in Grace's head; Dr. Simon Jordan physically uses his mouth to dominate women, as when he covers Rachel Humphrey's mouth with his "to silence her." He also has a vivid fantasy about Grace in which he presses his mouth against her and "applies [Murderess] to her throat like a brand." Similarly, James McDermott covers Grace's mouth when he attempts to rape her, and the guards who consistently harass Grace on her way to the Governor's house make comments like, "I hate a screeching slut, women should be born without mouths on them." Thus, *Alias Grace* sees mouths—and women's mouths, in particular—as an invitation to violence, since silencing women is a way to maintain power over them.

FLOWERS

Flowers in *Alias Grace* are directly related to women's deaths. Grace has a recurring hallucination of a bloody Nancy Montgomery exploding into red flower petals. Grace's mother's teapot, which is covered in a flowered pattern, shatters on the day she dies, and Grace believes that her mother's spirit destroyed the teapot as a kind of revenge. Finally, Mary Whitney's handkerchief—the one which Grace may or may not have used to strangle Nancy—is decorated with blue "love-in-a-mist" flowers. These three women (Nancy, Mary, and her mother) are the three most important female figures in Grace's life, and the fact that they are all linked to flower imagery suggests something important about the power of women. Flowers, because they are biologically linked to fruit and pollination, are a symbol of life; similarly, women, because of their ability to bear children, are often images of fertility. However, the role of flowers in this novel suggests that women have not only the power to create life, but also to embody death. Flowers, which bloom and then die, show that women can be vessels of both life and death. Grace makes a similar statement toward the end of the novel, when she discusses her possible pregnancy, saying that "it is strange to know you carry within yourself either a life or a death, but not to know which one." The flower imagery in the novel suggests that, on some level, all women embody this dichotomy. This allows women to transcend the role of life-sustaining child bearers, imbuing them with a far greater and darker power.

The idea that flowers are linked toward women's power is supported by the fact that flowers remain mysterious to male characters in the novel. For example, Dr. Jordan, when drafting a letter to his mother, realizes "he has never known much about flowers." This phrase takes on added significance due to the way flower imagery operates elsewhere in the text, suggesting that women are privy to an exclusive and deepened understanding of life and death which does not extend to men.

QUILTS

Quilts are an explicit symbol of female sexuality. Quilts are made by women and, as Grace points out, they are usually displayed on beds, making "the bed the most noticeable thing in a room." Grace reasons that by marking out the bed as worthy of notice, quilts function as warning flags. "You may think a bed a peaceful thing, Sir," she says to Dr. Jordan, "and to you it may mean rest and comfort and a good night's sleep. But it isn't so for everyone; and there are many dangerous things that take place in a bed." Though she doesn't say so explicitly, Grace is arguing that beds are dangerous places for women. She alludes to the fact that women often experience sex as violence—she calls intercourse "an indignity we must suffer through"—and she is openly arguing that sex is frequently a death sentence for women, since it leads to childbirth. By claiming that women place quilts on beds "for a warning," Grace is arguing that quilts act as a kind of signal, and the fact that she has to explain this function of quilts to Dr. Jordan suggests that quilts allow for communication specifically between women. In much the same way that Mary Whitney has to teach Grace about menstruation, quilts act as a way for women to discreetly share knowledge about their sexual lives with one another. In this way, quilts symbolize solidarity between women. This amounts to a radical statement, since women are subjugated in Grace's society, and their sex lives are marginalized.

A powerful example of quilts as a symbol of female solidarity occurs at the end of the novel, when Grace makes her first quilt that she will own. In it, she includes clothes of her own, of Mary Whitney's, and of Nancy Montgomery's, so that the three women can "all be together." Grace's inclusion of Nancy's clothes is particularly significant, since Nancy is a woman with whom Grace often disagreed and in whose murder Grace may have directly taken part. The fact that Grace still desires a feeling of closeness with Nancy suggests that the experience of womanhood is enough to bond two very different people. Mary and Nancy are also the two most unconventional women in the novel in terms of their sex lives; Grace, by contrast, is virtually a sexless character. Though other characters desire her, she expresses no sexual desire of her own. By linking herself to

Mary and Nancy in her quilt, Grace seems to be participating in their liberated sexuality, which was ultimately deadly to them in their real lives.

Finally, the names of quilt patterns function as the titles of each of the fifteen sections of *Alias Grace*. Sometimes the patterns/titles are related to the content of the section; for example, Grace meets Dr. Jordan while she is confined in a small, solitary prison cell in the section entitled "Puss in the Corner." However, there is not always a discernible relationship between the section name and the content of that section. Rather, Atwood's choice to use quilt patterns as a structural tool in the novel gestures to the larger question of how characters such as Grace and Dr. Jordan search for structure and meaning in their experiences. These characters are deeply enmeshed in the fraught process of storytelling, searching for patterns and symbols like those one might find in a quilt.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *Alias Grace* published in 1997.

Chapter 3 Quotes

They are like birdcages; but what is being caged in? Legs, the legs of ladies; legs penned in so they cannot get out and go rubbing up against the gentlemen's trousers. The Governor's wife never says legs, although the newspapers said legs when they were talking about Nancy, with her dead legs sticking out from under the washtub.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Nancy Montgomery, The Governor's Wife

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is reflecting on the fact that, since she has been imprisoned, fashion trends are changed dramatically. She notes that the women who visit the Governor's house wear wire crinolines under their dresses, rather than the horsehair crinolines that were en vogue at the time of her imprisonment. This quotation is important because it shows that Grace is thinking critically about the way that social norms around the question of women's dress are actually a manifestation of society's desire to repress and control female sexuality. This can be clearly seen in the fact that it is women's legs that must be confined and kept separate from men's, rather than the other way around. Grace is also mindful of the way that social class affects these norms; while the Governor's wife is careful to avoid any mention of women's body parts, even "legs," the newspapers that covered the murder of Nancy Montgomery were not so careful, as Nancy's working-class status seems to excuse "crude" descriptions about her. This quotation is also notable because it introduces the link between female sexuality and violence, which will be explored throughout the novel.

All the same, *Murderess* is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word—musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase. Sometimes at night I whisper it over to myself: *Murderess*, *Murderess*. It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor.

Murderer is merely brutal. It's like a hammer, or a lump of metal. I would rather be a murderess than a murderer, if those are the only choices.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation combines two important symbols in the novel. Flowers are strongly associated with death; not only are the flowers in this quotation dead ones, but they are directly linked to the word "murderess." Additionally, Grace's comparison of the word "murderess" to a taffeta skirt suggests that clothing is representative of identity, an idea that will become thematically central to the novel as it unfolds. This quotation is also important because it evokes the power of storytelling; because Grace has been depicted so often as a murderess, the label has "attached" itself to her, becoming a part of her identity whether she wills it to or not (and regardless of whether or not she actually murdered someone). Grace is also subtly pushing back against a social hierarchy that privileges men over women by claiming that murderesses are more complex and intriguing than murderers, who are one-dimensional and uninteresting.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ When I was quite young, six or seven, I put my hand on my mother's belly, which was all round and tight, and I said What is in there, another mouth to feed, and my mother smiled sadly and said Yes I fear so, and I had a picture of an enormous mouth, on a head like the flying angel heads on the gravestones, but with teeth and all, eating away at my mother from the inside, and I began to cry because I thought it would kill her.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Grace's Mother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

In this section of the novel, Grace has begun narrating her childhood to Dr. Jordan. She has already mentioned the fact that her father consistently referred to her and her many siblings as "mouths to feed," which explains the origin of her response to her mother's pregnancy. This quotation establishes a subtle link between sex and violence, and it also suggests that men are fundamentally dangerous to women. If she had not had sex with her husband (who, the reader can presume, has a voracious sexual appetite given the fact that Grace's mother has been pregnant thirteen times and lost several of these pregnancies), Grace's mother would not be in the position of being "eaten away at" by her pregnancy. Though Grace's childish interpretation of her mother being literally consumed by her pregnancy is hyperbolic, the idea that pregnancy is a sad, harrowing experience for Grace's mother nonetheless emphasizes the fact that even when they are engaging in socially-sanctioned marital sex, women are at a disadvantage in the power dynamic.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ It would be helpful to me, if she were indeed mad, or at least a little madder than she appears to be; but thus far she has manifested a composure that a duchess might envy. I have never known any woman to be so thoroughly self-contained.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Dr. Edward Murchie, Grace Marks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation comes from a letter that Simon has written to his friend Edward, describing his progress with regard to Grace's amnesia. Simon's description of Grace is powerful, because it reveals the many ways in which Grace defies Simon's expectations of her. Simon clearly expects Grace to manifest outward signs of "madness," and the fact that she does not suggests that Simon's understanding of madness as a visible condition might not be accurate. It also implies that madness might actually be, at least in some ways, a social construct, rather than a purely biological phenomenon. The fact that he compares Grace to a duchess, a social ranking far higher than Grace's actual working-class background, shows that Simon has bought into the notion that women of a higher social-class are more refined than their lower-class peers. Simon's underlying misogyny also peeks through in this quotation—his surprised claim that he has never met a woman as "thoroughly self-contained" as Grace suggests that Simon expects women to be needy, emotional, demonstrative creatures.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ And since that time I have thought, why is it that women have chosen to sew such flags, and then to lay them on the tops of beds? For they make the bed the most noticeable thing in a room. And then I have thought, it's for a warning. Because you may think a bed is a peaceful thing, Sir, and to you it may mean rest and comfort and a good night's sleep. But it isn't so for everyone; and there are many dangerous things that may take place in a bed. It is where we are born, and that is our first peril in life; and it is where the women give birth, which is often their last. And it is where the act takes place between men and women [...] and some call it love, and others despair, or else merely an indignity which they must suffer through.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Dr. Simon Jordan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Apropos of a memory she has of Mary Whitney, where the

two girls unpacked a set of winter quilts, Grace gives this remark about quilts. This is one of the most powerful quotations in the novel, as it clearly evokes the way that women use the tools available to them, such as quilt making, to express solidarity with other women and to warn them of the dangers posed to them by men. Atwood's authorial voice also clearly shines through here. Grace reclaims the dominant narrative—that sex is an act of love—and shows how it can be an indignity to women or even a violation (in the case of sexual assault), and also how it directly leads to the peril of childbirth, which (in her time and society) is often accompanied by the death of the mother. Grace is announcing the fact that sex has fundamentally different stakes for men and for women, and the fact that she explains these stakes to Dr. Jordan after acknowledging the simple meaning a bed has to him ("rest and comfort") shows that men are often unaware of the perils that women face in living their daily lives. Grace shows that the fact of the matter is that that women look death in the face every time they engage in sexual intercourse.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ There were red smears afterwards, on his shirt, from where she'd started to undo his buttons; but it was the first time he'd ever kissed a woman, and he'd been embarrassed, and then alarmed, and hadn't known what to do next. Probably she'd laughed at him.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

Simon is recalling his first kiss, which he shared with a servant in his childhood home. The maid, whose name Simon cannot remember, returned to her quarters after hulling strawberries, and found Simon rifling through her underwear. Simon says he knows the maid was angry at him, "but couldn't express her anger, of course, as she'd wanted to keep her position, so she'd done the womanly thing, and burst into tears." Simon embraced the maid to "console" her and the two ended up kissing.

This quotation is important because it reveals the wide gap between the way Simon thinks of and presents himself, and who he actually is. Simon describes himself as a kind master in this vignette; if anyone is at fault, according to his telling, it is the maid, who not only acted promiscuously by unbuttoning Simon's shirt, but also had the audacity to laugh at his sexual inexperience. The fact is that Simon doesn't actually know whether the maid laughed at him—he is uncomfortable with the idea that, in this situation, a woman had more power than he, a man, and so he casts the maid as a haughty person. Furthermore, Simon violated the maid's privacy by rifling through her undergarments, and the fact that he "consoled" her means next to nothing, given the fact that his status as the child of her employer meant she was unable to protest his violation. Simon ultimately takes pleasure in this memory, which shows that he enjoys holding power over women. The fact that Simon's understanding of who he is differs so greatly from what his actions show him to be also raises the possibility that the kissing Simon remembers as consensual (even initiated by the maid!) may have actually been coerced.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ […] and one day they did see a bear, and Nancy ran away screaming, and climbed a tree. Sally said the bear was more frightened than Nancy was, and Nancy said it was probably a gentleman bear and it was running away from something dangerous that it had never seen before, but might have caught a glimpse of as she climbed the tree; and they laughed very much.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Nancy Montgomery

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200-201

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation Grace is at the house where she was employed before transferring to Mr. Kinnear's house. Nancy has come to visit her old school friend Sally (now the cook at the house where Grace works) and the two women are laughing over the time that they encountered a bear on their way to school. Nancy seems to be alluding to the fact that the bear saw up her skirt as she was climbing the tree, which suggests that the "something dangerous" that this "gentleman" bear had never before encountered is Nancy's undergarments—perhaps even her genitalia. The fact that Nancy characterizes the bear as a "gentleman" is important because it suggests that men of a high social class are even more frightened of women than are their lower-class counterparts, because they have less experience actually interacting with women. This quotation is powerful because it suggests that women have a kind of inherent power over men that is rooted in their sexuality, and that men are

fundamentally frightened by this power. This quotation also reflects the importance of storytelling, which here allows Nancy and Sally to exchange perceptive truths about their social reality more or less in code. Their laughter then indicates how much of a relief this is to both women.

Chapter 25 Quotes

What was in there for wiping was an old copy of the Godey's Ladies' Book; I always looked at the pictures before using them. Most were of the latest fashions, but some were of duchesses from England and high-society ladies in New York and the like. You should never let your picture be in a magazine or newspaper if you can help it, as you never know what ends your face may be made to serve, by others, once it has got out of your control.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is describing the privy at Mr. Kinnear's house. This quotation is important for several reasons. First, it shows what a clever, entertaining storyteller Grace is—her pun about "ends," which is an innuendo referring to people's rear ends, is subtle wordplay, which speaks to Grace's facility with manipulating language. This quotation is also an example of Grace's ability to implicitly challenge existing social hierarchies: she seems to revel in the fact that she is wiping her bottom with images of high-class women. The fact that Grace enjoys looking at the fashions in the Ladies' Book first suggests her complicated relationship with the class system—she ascribes to it at the same time that she critiques it—and also emphasizes her fondness for clothing. Finally, this quotation provides insight into Grace's leery view of print media, and the fact that it can ultimately be used not only to metaphorically but also to literally denigrate a person (as ultimately happens to Grace herself).

Chapter 26 Quotes

And they do say that cleanliness is next to Godliness; and sometimes, when I have seen the pure white clouds billowing in the sky after a rain, I used to think that it was as if the angels themselves were hanging out their washing; for I reasoned that someone must do it, as everything in Heaven must be very clean and fresh.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is recalling a time at Mr. Kinnear's when she hung out the washing she had done on the clothesline. Her notion that the clean wash has a kind of divine quality suggests that (at least at this point in her life) Grace thought herself capable of reaching heaven, despite her humble origins and work during her life on earth. This idea is actually quite radical, as it also seems to suggest that there is something inherently sacred about the very work that Grace does as a servant. Finally, Grace's idea that there still exists a kind of class-based hierarchy in heaven ("someone," Grace points out, must do the angels' washing) shows how integral Grace's understanding of the class system is to her identity.

So there I was, pretending not to watch, and there he was, pretending not to be watched; and you may see the very same thing, Sir, at any polite gathering of society ladies and gentlemen. There is a good deal that can be seen slantwise, especially by the ladies, who do not wish to be caught staring. They can also see through veils, and window curtains, and over the tops of fans; and it is a good thing they can see in this way, or they would never see much of anything. But those of us who do not have to be bothered with all the veils and fans manage to see a good deal more.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Dr. Simon Jordan, James McDermott

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

In the moment she describes here, Grace was sitting outside with Nancy, surreptitiously observing James McDermott, who was running along the top of the snake fence around Mr. Kinnear's property. Grace's wry description of this moment speaks to her perceptiveness about relations between people. Though she is not herself a very sexual person, Grace is keenly aware of the sexual tension that exists between men and women, even in high-class settings where such tension would be considered vulgar. Here, Grace is also pointing out the way that society hinders women's ability to observe and interact with their world; they must look around and over and through the components of the houses to which they are confined and the clothing in which they must dress. Finally, Grace offers another of her subtle class critiques, by showing that lower-class women actually have more power to observe and keep tabs on their world than do their high-class counterparts; this represents an inversion of the traditional class hierarchy, which would privilege wealthier women over women of the working class.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ In fact I have no idea of what kind of a sunrise there was. In prison they make the windows high up, so you cannot climb out of them I suppose, but also so you cannot see out of them either, or at least not onto the outside world. They do not want you looking out, they do not want you thinking the word *out*, they do not want you looking at the horizon and thinking you might someday drop below it yourself, like the sail of a ship departing or a horse and rider vanishing down a far hillside.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

Grace has just described the beautiful sunrise that she has observed from her prison cell, only to retract her description by clarifying, as she does here, that she actually is unable to see the sun from her cell. This quotation shows how important storytelling is; Grace implies that being able to look out at the world and tell herself that she might escape out into it would be comforting. In order to control Grace, the powers that be have deliberately infringed upon her ability to tell herself such a story by depriving her of a view of the outside world—even, as she points out, by trying to wipe the word "out" from her mental vocabulary. The fact that Grace pictures a sunrise anyway speaks to her tenacity and her determination to use storytelling as a means of survival.

❝ But is it red where it most counts, says the other, a fire in a treetop is no use at all, it must be in a fireplace to cast enough heat, in a little cookstove, you know why God made women with skirts, it's so they can be pulled up over their heads and tied at the top, that way you don't get so much noise out of them, I hate a screeching slut, women should be born without mouths on them, the only thing of use in them is below the waist.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), The Guards

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation Grace is remembering some of the atrocious things that the guards said to her as they escorted her to the Governor's house that day. The guard who makes this comment reveals how brutally he objectifies Grace; he asks whether her pubic hair is red like the hair on her head, because the only part of Grace that interests him is the fact that she has the physical potential to pleasure him sexually. The fact that he says a woman's skirts should be pulled over her head to keep her from protesting when a man rapes her reinforces the fact that this guard sees women only as sexual objects. This quotation is important because it illustrates the extreme misogyny present in Grace's society. The misogynistic comments expressed by characters like Dr. Simon Jordan are merely a quieter iteration of this deeply-engrained societal prejudice against women.

Chapter 28 Quotes

Then I say, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Sir, this radish was like the nectar of the Gods. He looks surprised to hear me use such an expression; but that's only because he doesn't remember that I have read the poetry of Sir Walter Scott.

Because he was so thoughtful as to bring me this radish, I set to work willingly to tell my story, and to make it as interesting as I can, and rich in incident, as a sort of return gift to him; for I have always believed that one good turn deserves another.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Dr. Simon Jordan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

At her request, Dr. Jordan has brought Grace a radish, which prompts this exchange. The fact that Dr. Jordan is surprised by Grace's Walter Scott reference is important because it shows how little Dr. Jordan expects of Grace—perhaps because of her incarcerated status, but also because of her social class and her gender. The most significant aspect of this quotation is Grace's desire to repay Dr. Jordan for his gift by offering him an entertaining rendition of her life story. This is noteworthy on two levels. First, Grace's desire shows that she views her skill at storytelling as a source of power, since it allows her to bestow gifts on people despite the fact that, as a prisoner, she has no possessions or money. This speaks to the centrality of storytelling to Grace's identity, and also reinforces the fact that she takes comfort in stories and wants to transfer this comfort to Dr. Jordan. Grace's goal of making a "return gift" out of her narration is also crucial because it raises the possibility that Grace may not have been faithfully recounting her life story up to this point in the novel. The fact that she here admits to a motivation for manipulating her story—to please Dr. Jordan—implies that she may have had other motivations (obscuring her guilt in the double murders?) all along. This quotation is thus a reminder of the fact that Grace is at once a compelling storyteller and an unreliable one.

Chapter 32 Quotes

Underneath her stiff dress there must be breasts, not starched and corset-shaped, but made of soft flesh, with nipples; he finds himself idly guessing what colour these nipples would be, in sunlight or else in lamplight, and how large. Nipples pink and small like the snouts of animals, of rabbits or mice perhaps; or the almost-red of ripening currants; or the scaly brown of acorn caps. His imagination runs, he notes, to wildwood details, and to things hard or alert.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Mrs. Rachel Humphrey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Simon has these thoughts while breakfasting with his landlady, Rachel Humphrey. This quotation appears before Simon has begun an affair with Rachel. Simon's sexual fantasy about Mrs. Humphrey reveals his tendency to reduce women to less than human status: he considers Rachel's body parts as if they belonged to animals, or were inanimate food items like currants. The fact that Simon is mentally undressing Mrs. Humphrey while she is merely trying to eat her breakfast shows that Simon's fundamental metric for women's worth is how useful or attractive they would be to him sexually. Finally, this quotation is significant in that it is followed up by Simon's claim that Mrs. Humphrey "does not attract him." This raises two possibilities: either Simon is being disingenuous about his attraction to Mrs. Humphrey, and/or he is so thoroughly steeped in the idea that women's primary function is as sexual objects for men that he has involuntary sexual thoughts about women to whom he does not even feel sexual attraction. Either possibility indicates a disturbing tendency on Simon's part to objectify women, flattening them into one-dimensional, less-than-human creatures.

Chapter 33 Quotes

It's dark as a stone in this room, and hot as a roasting heart; if you stare into the darkness with your eyes open you are sure to see something after a time. I hope it will not be flowers. But this is the time they like to grow, the red flowers, the shining red peonies which are like satin, which are like splashes of paint. The soil for them is emptiness, it is empty space and silence. I whisper, *Talk to me*; because I would rather have talking than the slow gardening that takes place in silence, with the red satin petals dripping down the wall.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is lying on the bed in her solitary prison cell, remembering her life at Mr. Kinnear's and experiencing her recurring hallucination about red flowers. Grace's attempt to talk to these imagined flowers shows not only how desperate she is for conversation (in the absence of a human with whom to speak), but also how her default response to unpleasant experiences is to engage with language—in other words, to tell a story. The fact that Grace specifies that she has this flower hallucination when she is surrounded by "empty space and silence" highlights the toll that being imprisoned has taken on her. Being deprived of conversation and human interaction has caused Grace to exhibit signs of "madness"—and indeed, it's been shown that sensory deprivation can cause hallucinations even in the most "sane" of people. This is the opposite of what many other characters in the novel believe, which is that Grace's madness has resulted in her being locked up, alone and without the ability to converse with other people.

It is morning, and time to get up; and today I must go on with the story. Or the story must go on with me, carrying me inside it, along the track it must travel, straight to the end, weeping like a train and deaf and single-eyed and locked tight shut; although I hurl myself against the walls of it and scream and cry, and beg to God himself to let me out.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs just before Grace is going to narrate the day of the murders to Dr. Jordan. Grace's likening of the experience of telling her story to being trapped against her will in a hurtling train car speaks to the dark side of storytelling, the power of a story to run away with its author. Grace's description also suggests that being forced to narrate—and thus re-live—the details of the double murders is a kind of divine punishment for Grace. This quotation thus evokes the potential negative power of storytelling, which is the extreme toll that it can take on the storyteller.

Chapter 35 Quotes

Grace continues her stitching. She does not look up. "Nobody has cared about that before, Sir," she says. "They told me I must be lying; they kept wanting to know more. Except for Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie the lawyer. But I am sure that even he did not believe me."

"I will believe you," says Simon. It is, he realizes, a fairly large undertaking.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Grace Marks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears right as Simon is about to interview Grace about the day the murders took place. Simon has just asked Grace to do her best to tell him what she herself can actually remember—as opposed to her giving the account of the murders that she was instructed to present at her trial. Grace's insistence that no one has cared about her version of events before underscores how important it is for Simon to keep his promise of believing Grace. The fact that Grace specifies that no one has ever believed her claim that she cannot remember many hours of the day the murders took place emphasizes society's tendency to dismiss women's voices, at the same time that they are captivated by them, constantly "wanting to know more."

Chapter 36 Quotes

I said, What do you want here, but he did not answer, he just kept on being silver, so I went out to milk the cow; because the only thing to do about God is to go on with what you were doing anyway, since you can't ever stop him or get any reasons out of him. There is a Do this or a Do that with God, but not any Because.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

Grace sees God, manifested as a silver light, in the kitchen of Mr. Kinnear's house moments before McDermott fells Nancy with an axe. This quotation highlights Grace's sense of fatalism, and also raises intriguing questions about her relationship to God. Many other moments in the novel have underscored the importance of conversation in Grace's life, and the fact that she cannot "get any reasons" from God seems to suggest that there is fundamentally something unsatisfying to her about the idea of a higher power. However, despite any frustration Grace might feel at God's lack of "Because," she persists in her religious belief, which shows the importance of this belief to the way she was raised.

This quotation is also important because by saying that she saw God, Grace is making a radical claim. She is essentially claiming for herself the powers of a saint or prophet, and the fact that she does so with relative nonchalance further emphasizes the fact that she sees no contradiction in God presenting himself to a woman of her low social status, despite any protestations that higher-class people might have to this idea. Yet again, Grace is inverting the class hierarchy by claiming for herself powers that normally would be denied her.

Chapter 37 Quotes

But he'll pry it out of her yet. He's got the hook in her mouth, but can he pull her out? Up, out of the abyss, up to the light. Out of the deep blue sea.

He wonders why he's thinking in such drastic terms. He means her well, he tells himself. He thinks of it as a rescue, surely he does.

But does she? If she has anything to hide, she may want to stay in the water, in the dark, in her element. She may be afraid she won't be able to breathe, otherwise.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Grace Marks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

Grace has just finished narrating the murder of Mr. Kinnear by James McDermott, but Simon feels dissatisfied, because Grace has refused to definitively reveal "knowledge of guilt, or else of innocence."

This quotation is important for several reasons. The first is that Simon's insistence that he means well toward Grace and that he wants to "rescue" her suggests that this might not actually be the reason he is interviewing her. The fact that Simon wants to "pry" the truth out of Grace and that he imagines himself as hooking her like a fish suggests that he actually wants to conquer, rather than rescue, her. Secondly, Simon's conception of Grace as a fish—even of a nameless, dark, aquatic creature—suggests that he thinks of Grace as fundamentally different from himself. Simon seems to want to view Grace in a romantic light, as a mysterious, unknowable woman, yet his description of her also seems to imply that he is frightened of her, and frustrated by the fact that she has the power to inhabit a realm that he can never fully enter (thus, his resolution to drag her out by force).

Chapter 38 Quotes

Then I put on a clean apron, and stirred up the fire in the summer kitchen stove, which still had some embers left in it, and burnt my own clothes; I didn't like the thought of wearing them ever again, as they would remind me of things I wished to forget. It may have been my fancy, but a smell went up from them like scorching meat; and it was like my own dirtied and cast-off skin that was burning.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

Before leaving the Kinnear household in the wake of Mr. Kinnear's and Nancy's murders, Grace dons some of Nancy's clothes and burns her own in the fireplace. This quotation demonstrates the lengths to which Grace is

willing to go to repress painful memories; while she is not literally burning her skin, there does seem to be an almost masochistic element to Grace burning her old clothes. The way that this quotation draws a direct link between clothing and identity is also important because it suggests the hopeful, at least to Grace, possibility that one can discard one's identity as easily as one might change one's outfit.

Chapter 39 Quotes

I was horrified, and asked how could he do such a thing; and he said what did I mean, as I was wearing Nancy's dress and bonnet myself. And I said it was not the same thing, and he said it was; and I said at least I had not taken the boots off a corpse.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Mr. Thomas Kinnear, Nancy Montgomery, James McDermott

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

While waiting for the ferry that will carry her to the States, Grace notices that McDermott is wearing some of Mr. Kinnear's clothes. She is particularly horrified by the fact that McDermott has donned the exact boots Kinnear was wearing when he was murdered. For some reason, Grace is unable—or unwilling—to acknowledge that the fact that she has also put on one of Nancy's old dresses is equally as horrifying. It is difficult to know whether Grace genuinely believes there is a distinction between her actions and McDermott's, or if she is trying to assuage her own conscience by telling herself that her sin has been of a lesser magnitude. Regardless of how one interprets this quotation, it remains significant because it emphasizes that the social transgression of donning their employers' clothes is in some strange way almost more radical and more unforgiveable than the fact that McDermott and Grace have murdered these two people.

Chapter 43 Quotes

He wanted me to tell my story in what he called a coherent way, but would often accuse me of wandering, and become annoyed with me; and at last he said that the right thing was, not to tell the story as I truly remembered it, which nobody could be expected to make any sense of; but to tell a story that would hang together, and that had some chance of being believed.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 357

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is recounting the advice of her lawyer, Mr. MacKenzie, in advance of her trial. MacKenzie's dismissal of Grace's version of events as incoherent and unbelievable seems to represent the tendency of society at large to cast women as irrational and overly emotional. The fact that MacKenzie implicitly characterizes Grace's way of storytelling as the *wrong* thing shows that even though he may be interested in helping Grace avoid a death sentence, MacKenzie is equally as interested in manipulating her words so that she presents the version of events he deems it right for her to tell. This is significant, because the other option MacKenzie could have chosen would have been to counsel Grace simply to state (truthfully) that she could not remember the day of the murders. Instead, MacKenzie also invalidates this experience of Grace's, opting instead to pressure her into presenting an account that he thinks will be believable and coherent—partly by virtue of the fact that it as been written by a man.

Chapter 44 Quotes

During the day, Rachel is a burden, an encumbrance, and he wishes to be rid of her; but at night she's an altogether different person, and so is he. He too says no when he means yes. He means more, he means further, he means deeper. He would like to make an incision in her—just a small one—so he can taste her blood, which in the shadowy darkness of the bedroom seems to him like a normal wish to have.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Mrs. Rachel Humphrey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365-366

Explanation and Analysis

Simon is reflecting on his affair with his landlady. The unsettling violence of this quotation is important on two distinct levels. Firstly, Simon's desire to cut Rachel open suggests, yet again, his unshakeable desire to be physically dominant over women. Secondly, and perhaps even more significantly, Simon's desire to taste Rachel's blood implies that there is something about this blood that might enhance Simon's feeling of power. Partially, this seems due to the fact that not only cutting Rachel but then also imbibing her blood would be a way for Simon to further his power over her. However, there also seems to be an implication here that something about Rachel's blood could be inherently, primordially powerful; it seems Simon is recognizing Rachel's power as a woman, and that he wants to co-opt it. Finally, this passage is noteworthy because it reflects Simon's tendency to dismiss Rachel as needy and unappealing during the day—when he would be "disgracing" himself by openly flirting with a woman below his class status—while he simultaneously enjoys having sex with her at night. Additionally, Simon doesn't actually say what makes Rachel different during the night—he does not describe her as sexually curious or avid; instead, he only describes the "change" in himself. This suggests that perhaps Rachel is the same at night and during the day, and that none of Simon's characterization of her is actually accurate.

Chapter 46 Quotes

❝ I hope I was named after it. I would like to be found. I would like to see. Or to be seen. I wonder if, in the eye of God, it amounts to the same thing. As it says in the Bible, *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.*

If it is face to face, there must be two looking.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

Grace finds herself wondering why Dr. Jordan's first name is Simon, which leads her to wonder whether she herself was named after the hymn "Amazing Grace." This quotation is powerful, because it shows that Grace wants to be seen as a complex, full person—rather than as a spectacle or sensation. This desire movingly evokes the deep loneliness Grace has experienced all her life, which might in itself be an explanation for her intense religious convictions. Furthermore, this passage is significant because it emphasizes Grace's intellectual maturation over the course of her long imprisonment; she has previously stated that when she was a child, thoughts of God made her sleepy, but she is now thinking with great nuance about the meaning of Biblical language, and of the fundamentals of humans' relationship to God.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ Then there are his own requirements. There is passion in Grace somewhere, he's certain of it, although it would take some hunting for. And she'd be grateful to him, albeit reluctantly. Gratitude by itself does not enthral [sic] him, but he likes the idea of reluctance.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Mrs. Constance Jordan, Grace Marks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 388

Explanation and Analysis

Simon is reflecting on the type of woman his mother would like him to marry. Simon claims that Grace is the first and only woman that he would actually like to marry. This quotation is significant because it reveals the twisted depth of Simon's prejudice against women. First of all, he assumes that Grace would be grateful to him for forcing her to wrestle with painful memories in order for Simon to determine whether she is guilty or innocent. Secondly, Simon explicitly confesses here that the idea of a woman resisting him—emotionally and perhaps even physically—sexually arouses him. The fact that he only feels attracted to Grace because she meets *this* "requirement"—he doesn't bother to consider her personality, her intellectual capability, et cetera—shows that even with regard to the woman whom he ostensibly prefers above all others, Simon is incapable of thinking of a woman as more than a repository for his own sexual desires.

Chapter 48 Quotes

❝ "You killed her," breathes Lydia. "I always thought so." She sounds, if anything, admiring.

"The kerchief killed her. Hands held it," says the voice. "She had to die. The wages of sin is death. And this time the gentleman died as well, for once. Share and share alike!"

Related Characters: Mary Whitney, Grace Marks, Miss Lydia (speaker), Mr. Thomas Kinnear, Nancy Montgomery, Dr. Simon Jordan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 401

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears during Grace's hypnosis. The voice that is speaking from Grace's body is about to reveal that it belongs not to Grace herself, but to Mary Whitney.

Many elements of this quotation are significant. The first is Lydia's admiration of Mary's admission that she strangled Nancy to death. Because Simon is narrating this scene, it is difficult to know exactly what to make of Lydia's reaction, but it seems that she is moved by the knowledge that a woman of her own age was capable of such violence—which, when it comes down to it, is fundamentally an act of agency, an exertion of one's own will, in the extreme. This suggests that the possibility a woman could do such a thing is alluring to Lydia, because it is beyond what she has been taught to believe possible. The second important aspect of this quotation is that Mary simultaneously admits to strangling Nancy and displaces this act onto Grace's physical body—*not* Grace herself. This strange shifting of responsibility suggests that despite her conviction, Mary might actually be ashamed, or worried about the consequences, of admitting her guilt. Perhaps the most important element of this quotation is that Mary takes pleasure in the fact that Mr. Kinnear died as well as Nancy, since they both committed the same "crime." Here Mary is pointing out the hypocrisy of a society that punishes women for pre-marital sex but absolves men of the same transgression.

Chapter 49 Quotes

He'll begin to tiptoe up the stairs, intending to avoid her. Then he'll turn around, make his way to her room, shake her roughly awake. Tonight he'll hit her, as she's begged him to; he's never done that before, it's something new. He wants to punish her for his own addiction to her. He wants to make her cry; though not too loudly, or Dora will hear them, and trumpet scandal.

Related Characters: Dr. Simon Jordan (speaker), Dora, Mrs. Rachel Humphrey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 408

Explanation and Analysis

Simon is returning to the Humphrey household following Grace's hypnosis session, and he is channeling his frustration at Grace—he cannot decide whether or not he believes that she was actually possessed by Mary Whitney's spirit—onto Rachel, whom he imagines having sex with and physically beating. It is difficult to know whether Simon's claim that Rachel has "begged him" to hit her is true, or whether he is making this up as an excuse to express his own feelings of violence. Regardless, the fact that Simon wants to be physically violent toward Rachel at the same time that he has sex with her shows how fully Simon wants to exert power over the woman with whom he is having an affair. A final important aspect of this quotation is that Simon is aware of the damage to his reputation that would occur if his affair with his landlady were to come to public attention. This shows that Simon is concerned with maintaining appearances, a fact that makes his violent treatment of Rachel all the more disturbing.

Chapter 51 Quotes

The room was so large it was almost frightening to me, and I pulled the sheet up over my head to make it darker; and then I felt as if my face was dissolving and turning into someone else's face, and I recalled my poor mother in her shroud, as they were sliding her into the sea, and how I thought that she had already changed inside the sheet, and was a different woman, and now the same thing was happening to me. Of course I wasn't dying, but it was in a way similar.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Grace's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 442-443

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs when Grace is spending the night at the warden's house, after learning of her pardon and her release from prison. Grace's feeling that she is the second woman in her family to experience death (literal or metaphorical) as a kind of rebirth speaks to a thematic undercurrent of the novel which suggests that women have a unique relationship to the twinned forces of life and death.

This quotation is also important because the fact that Grace imagines her face "turning into someone else's face" seems to be indicative of the central place that being a prisoner—and perhaps even a murderer—has taken in her identity. This moment is a turning point for Grace because she is confronting the fact that the ending to her story will be different from the one she had imagined—and this seems to require her to become a different kind of character in her own story. There is a horror inherent in this, and the fact that Grace even conceives of her freedom in the terms one would conceive of death shows that she is acutely aware of the fact that her release from prison represents, at its core, yet another upheaval in her life.

❝ Janet gave me a pair of summer gloves, almost new, I don't know where she got them. And then she began to cry, and when I asked her why she was doing that, she said it was because I was to have a happy ending, and it was just like a book; and I wondered what books she'd been reading.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Janet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 446

Explanation and Analysis

Just before she is to leave Canada for her new post-prison life in the States, Grace receives a pair of gloves from Janet, the warden's daughter. This quotation is noteworthy because it shows how differently Janet and Grace conceive of stories. While Grace recognizes their power, she is also acutely aware of the sadness in all stories; she seems almost disbelieving of the fact that happy stories actually exist anywhere for Janet to read. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that Grace has never known lasting happiness in her life; how, then, could she believe it to exist in stories? On the other hand, this seems to be an indication not only of Grace's pragmatism but also her deep sensitivity. As she told Dr. Jordan, people in trouble recognize trouble in others, and it seems that Grace's extraordinary life may have invested her with the power to perceive that there is sadness in every story, even the ostensibly happy ones.

Chapter 53 Quotes

❝ But three of the triangles in my Tree will be different. One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney's; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away.

I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern.

And so we will all be together.

Related Characters: Grace Marks (speaker), Mr. Thomas Kinnear, Nancy Montgomery, Mary Whitney

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 460

Explanation and Analysis

Grace is describing the quilt that she is making for herself—the first quilt that she will make and actually keep. She has modified the requirements of a traditional Tree of Paradise quilt to fit her own understanding of religion and of life. This is the final quotation of the novel, and it is deeply mysterious. The fact that Grace wants to remember her time in prison, and that she wants to memorialize Nancy Montgomery in the same way she memorializes Mary Whitney, is complex to the point of inscrutability. The most important aspect of this quotation is the very last line of the novel, which not only underscores the symbolism of quilts as markers of female solidarity, but also shows how important women have been in Grace's life. Even Nancy is included in this sisterhood, despite Grace's fraught relationship with her; and, indeed, Grace even includes the past version of herself, a woman imprisoned and thought to be both mad and a murderess. The complicated companionship embodied in this quilt thus seems to suggest that women are each other's brightest hope in a world that is structured to disempower them at every turn.

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.

EPIGRAPHS

The first epigraph of the novel is from William Morris's poem, "The Defence of Guenevere." It reads: "Whatever may have happened through these years,God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie."

Morris's poem, published in 1855, focuses on the trial of Guenevere (the queen of Arthurian legend). Guenevere is on trial for having cheated on her husband, King Arthur, with his knight Lancelot. Guenevere speaks most of the poem (including this line) herself, offering her own account of her relationship with Lancelot. In this line, she accuses Gawain, another of Arthur's knights and presumably Guenevere's prosecutor in this trial, of misrepresenting her relationship. This line becomes a refrain: Guenevere repeats it no less than three times while defending herself. Atwood's decision to use this line as one of the novel's epigraphs highlights the parallels between Guenevere and Grace, who is similarly offering a "true" account of her life—and possibly her guilt. This epigraph also highlights the subjective nature of truth; Guenevere doesn't actually deny that she has had an affair, but she suggests that there is a truer version of events than the one that is being told about her. This epigraph thus also underscores the importance of women being able to narrate their own stories—to offer their own "defences."

The second epigraph is from a letter written by Emily Dickinson. She writes, "I have no Tribunal."

This line comes from a letter Dickinson wrote to a critic who had refused to publish her poems, calling them "uncontrolled" and "spasmodic." Dickinson's response highlights her refusal to be judged by men. In fact, this quotation seems to suggest that Dickinson values her own approval over those of all others who might make up her tribunal. Atwood's decision to use this line introduces a main question of the novel about the relationship between civil (or divine) justice and a person's individual sense of self.

The third opening epigraph of the novel is from a nonfiction work called *The Soul of the White Ant*, by naturalist Eugène Marais. It reads: "I cannot tell you what the light is, but I can tell you what it is not… What is the motive of the light? What is the light?"

Marais, a South African naturalist and author, published this book about termites in 1937. Much of his work in this book was later plagiarized by Belgian Nobel Laureate Maurice Maeterlinck. The historical background of this quotation complicates Atwood's exploration of the power of the written word in Alias Grace, *since the history of Marais's book shows that even written stories can be manipulated and reappropriated. The content of this quotation echoes the mystery that surrounds Grace Marks in the novel, with characters wondering about whether she is a murderous demon or an innocent, wronged woman. This quotation shows how sometimes the only way to understand something or someone is to define it by what it is not—which does not produce a very concrete understanding. This quotation also reflects concerns that Grace herself has, particularly about the mystery and unknowability of God.*

CHAPTER 1

It is April, 1851, and twenty-three-year-old Grace Marks is about to begin her eighth year of imprisonment in the Kingston Penitentiary. Grace describes walking around the walled-in prison yard, hallucinating about peonies growing from the gravel. Her hallucination expands: she sees Nancy Montgomery kneeling on the ground in front of her, blood streaming from her head and a kerchief tied around her neck. Nancy smiles—"only the **mouth**," Grace says—and then she explodes into red **flower** petals made of cloth, and Grace appears to lose consciousness. The chapter ends with Grace saying, "This is what I told Dr. Jordan, when we came to that part of the story."

On a plot level, this opening chapter not only captures the reader's attention, but also establishes the fact that this strange hallucination/memory is only part of a much larger story. In this way, this chapter subtly establishes the importance of context and the critical role that an understanding of surrounding details plays in being able to interpret a larger story. This chapter also raises the related questions of what is real, and how reliable of a narrator Grace is. Finally, it firmly establishes Grace's confident, almost seductive powers as a storyteller.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter is written in the form of a broadsheet poem, which tells the story of the Kinnear and Montgomery murders. The poem reads, "Now Grace, she loved good Thomas Kinnear, / McDermott he loved Grace, / And 'twas these loves as I do tell / That brought them to disgrace." The poem claims that Grace was jealous of Nancy, Kinnear's lover, so she persuaded James McDermott to kill Nancy in exchange for the promise that Grace would become his lover. The poem ends by stating that if Grace repents, "she will be as white as snow, / And into Heaven will pass, / And she will dwell in Paradise, / In Paradise at last." The chapter also includes drawings of Grace and McDermott; Grace's portrait is captioned with her name and her alias, Mary Whitney.

This chapter provides insight into popular opinion about Grace, while also highlighting the power of stories, regardless of their truth. After the reader has encountered this account of the Kinnear-Montgomery murders, it might be difficult to shake the belief that McDermott and Grace were somehow romantically involved. The broadsheet poem itself also raises important questions about the nature of women—while Grace is depicted as a jealous, conniving, sex-hungry fiend, she is also depicted as capable of redemption (which is also framed in the sexualized terms of becoming white, a color associated with virginity). Finally, the portraits included in this chapter act as a different kind of storytelling; the caption that provides Grace's alias also interacts with the title of the novel, raising the question of which Grace is the "true" Grace and which is the double, who sports an alias.

CHAPTER 3

The year is now 1859 and Grace, while still imprisoned, is working in the house of the prison Governor. Of the Governor's wife Grace says, "She must make the most of her social position and accomplishments, although an object of fear, like a spider, and of charity as well, I am also one of the accomplishments." Grace describes the many women who come to the Governor's home on Tuesdays to discuss politics and on Thursdays to hold séances. Grace also thinks the women come to get a glimpse of her.

This passage quickly introduces the reader to Grace's keen observation skills and her perceptive understanding of social/class dynamics. Grace's feeling of being on display as one of the Governor's wife's "accomplishments" is one that will be revisited throughout the novel—Grace often feels she is being treated as a kind of intriguing spectacle, rather than as a complex human.

Grace says that sometimes when she is dusting at the Governor's house, she looks in the mirror and wonders how she can be "all of the different things" that were said about her in the paper. She mentions that her lawyer, Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie, had the idea to depict her as an idiot in an attempt to have her sentence commuted. Grace says of MacKenzie, "I wonder if he ever believed a word I said."

This passage gives the reader a sense of the conflicting narratives about Grace; it also indicates that Grace herself finds these narratives disorienting because they make her question her own identity. Furthermore, this passage establishes the stakes of Grace's soon-to-come interviews with Dr. Simon Jordan. Because Mr. MacKenzie likely did not believe Grace's story, it is even more important that Dr. Jordan—and the reader—does.

Grace describes the scrapbooks that the Governor's wife and her daughters keep. The daughters, Misses Lydia and Marianne, keep letters from friends, while the Governor's wife fills her scrapbook with newspaper articles about criminals. Grace claims that the real reason anyone is interested in her story is not because they want to know whether she is a murderess, but because they want to know if Grace and McDermott actually were lovers.

This passage shows how obsessed Grace's society is with female sexuality. At the same time that society does not want women to be openly sexual, it is fascinated by the fact that women do, in fact, have sexual desires. Grace expresses her frustration at society's focus on her sex life, which suggests that she feels there are other parts of her life that are more important and foundational. This is inherently a challenge to societal norms, since women in Victorian society were meant to exist primarily (if not exclusively) in the domestic sphere, meaning that their role in society, as mothers, was defined solely by their reproductive capabilities. This passage also reflects the fact that women are confronted with a lose-lose situation, in which society considers them at once too sexual and not sexual enough.

Grace reveals that today she is waiting not for the ladies who usually come to the house, but for a doctor, who she has been told is writing a book. As she waits, she recalls the day James McDermott was hanged, saying, "There were many women and ladies there; everyone wanted to stare, they wanted to breathe death in like a fine perfume." When the doctor arrives, Grace screams and loses consciousness at the sight of his "bagful of shining knives."

Like the preceding passages, this shows how eager society is to view Grace as a spectacle—to reduce her to a vehicle via which they can experience the "illicit" components of human existence, like sex, death, and murder. This passage also begins to demonstrate the power that memory has over Grace, since the very sight of the doctor triggers memories so powerful that she blacks out.

CHAPTER 4

Grace is revived and scolded for her "hysterics," since the doctor's bag was actually full of calipers (head-measuring devices), not knives. Grace is dragged back to the Penitentiary and deposited in a cell, which she says is similar to the one she was held in before being sent to an asylum in Toronto, where she was sexually abused by a doctor named Dr. Bannerling. Alone in her cell, Grace falls asleep.

This passage underscores the way in which Grace's society tends to dismiss women as overly emotional, rather than acknowledge their experiences. Grace is overwhelmed by the sight of the doctor because he is a reminder of the sexual abuse she has experienced, yet her reaction is interpreted as dramatic and irrational. This stands in stark contrast to the fact that the doctor has come to measure Grace's head as part of the medical community's genuine, if misguided, interest in mental illness. Despite a professed interest in Grace's life as a "madwoman," doctors like this one are not at all interested in validating her experiences. In fact, the man who abused Grace was himself a physician, which demonstrates the intense, even violently hypocritical views that Grace's society holds toward women.

Grace is held in solitary confinement for several days, during which time she thinks often of someone named Mary Whitney. Finally, Grace hears a knock at the door and invites the person in.

The fact that Grace uses her memories of Mary to keep her company while she is alone is a testament not only to the women's friendship, but also to the power that memory can act as a comfort. This passage shows that memory does not always have to be fraught, as it often is for Grace; sometimes, it can be a distinctly positive force.

CHAPTER 5

A young man enters Grace's cell and introduces himself as Dr. Simon Jordan. Grace immediately asks whether the other doctor is going to return, and Dr. Jordan assures her he won't. Dr. Jordan asks if Grace is afraid of him, and she thinks, "No one comes to see me here unless they want something."

This moment reveals how deeply skeptical Grace is about being treated as a pawn by yet another doctor. She is extremely perceptive and sensitive to the power politics involved in any given situation.

Dr. Jordan tells Grace he is from Massachusetts and the two discuss his travels. Grace thinks that Dr. Jordan "must be a wanderer, like Jeremiah the peddler." Dr. Jordan then offers Grace an apple, which she accepts; she tells him, however, "I am not a dog," at which he laughs. Dr. Jordan asks why Grace is not eating the apple. Though she gives a casual reply, Grace admits, "I don't want him to see my hunger. If you have a need and they find it out, they will use it against you."

Here Grace is clearly asserting her personhood, but Dr. Jordan's flippant laughter suggests that he does not understand why *Grace feels she needs to do this. This suggests that Dr. Jordan has a lot to learn from Grace about her experiences as a woman. Grace's statement about having her hunger used against her also speaks to the way that society closely monitors and manipulates female desire (although desire in this case is not explicitly sexual).*

Dr. Jordan asks Grace what the apple makes her think of. She knows that he wants her to guess the apple of the Tree of Knowledge. "Any child could guess it," she says. "But I will not oblige." Grace instead asks if Dr. Jordan is a preacher; he tells her he is a doctor of the mind. To herself, Grace characterizes Dr. Jordan as "a collector."

Grace's internal dialogue reveals the stark gap between what she says and what she is actually thinking. This is an important moment for the reader to consider as the novel progresses, as Grace is not always so open about the way she tries to outmaneuver those who would try to control her. Grace's description of Dr. Jordan as a collector is also important, as his behavior toward women will confirm his tendency to objectify them.

Dr. Jordan tells Grace he would like to help her, saying that if she will talk he will listen. Grace asks if she will be taken back to the Asylum, and Dr. Jordan promises she will not. Grace says nothing, but she raises the apple and presses it against her forehead.

This is a mysterious gesture, and the fact that Grace provides no explanation, even though she is narrating this chapter, suggests that there is a part of Grace's mind to which the reader can never have access, making her an even more complex narrator. It is possible that there is some Biblical imagery here and that by pressing the apple to her forehead Grace is associating herself with Eve.

CHAPTER 6

This chapter is made up of letters. The first is to Dr. Simon Jordan from a Dr. Joseph Workman, superintendent of the asylum in Toronto. Dr. Workman tells Simon that he should contact a Dr. Samuel Bannerling for information about Grace Marks. Dr. Workman was appointed to his post at the asylum only a few weeks before Grace's fifteen-month stay (1852-1853) ended and she was returned to the penitentiary in Kingston. Dr. Workman also offers Simon some tips for the private asylum he one day hopes to open.

Dr. Workman is a minor character, but his account of Grace, whom he compassionately describes in this letter as industrious and kind, will stand in direct contrast to the evil Dr. Bannerling's descriptions of her later in the novel. The conflicting accounts of Grace given by the doctors who have attended her paint a complex portrait of Grace's relative "sanity" and problematize the question of whether (in)sanity can ever be accurately assessed, especially when many of the people working in the mental health system are corrupt.

The second letter is to Simon from his ailing mother, Constance Jordan. Mrs. Jordan laments her son's line of work, saying, "No one in the Family has ever concerned himself with Lunatics before." She also strongly hints that she would like Simon to marry a woman named Faith Cartwright.

This letter introduces Simon's mother as a money-oriented woman with tunnel vision about arranging an advantageous marriage for her son. Mrs. Jordan's derision of Simon's line of work also speaks to the entrenched class values in this society, showing how those who are mentally unstable are inherently considered to be a lower class of person by people like Mrs. Jordan.

The third letter is from Simon to his friend Dr. Edward Murchie. Simon explains that he is working on behalf of a Reverend Verringer, to whom he was recommended by someone named Dr. Binswanger. Simon describes his lodgings in Kingston, at the home of a Major C. D. Humphrey. Simon tells his friend that his task will not be easy, "as the gentle Grace, having been hardened in the fire now for some fifteen years, will be a very hard nut to crack."

Aside from providing details about Simon's work in Kingston, this letter is important because of the insight it provides into how Simon conceptualizes his work with Grace. He compares her to a physical object, a metaphor which implies that the effort to recover Grace's memory will be a violent one that will leave her seriously damaged. Simon is not aware of the inherent violence of his language, but it will continue to manifest itself throughout the novel, and his feelings about how "gentle" Grace is will continue to evolve, as he finds himself wishing that Grace would be weaker and more dependent on him.

CHAPTER 7

This is the first chapter that follows Simon. Simon's late father was a well-to-do mill owner whose business recently failed. Simon now needs to discover and publish something revolutionary in order to gain fame and raise the funds to achieve his dream of opening a private asylum. Simon realizes that, ultimately, he will likely have to "marry money," as his mother did.

This passage provides important details about Simon's class background. It also establishes the high stakes of Simon's work with Grace: if Simon is not able to produce a well-received paper from his interviews with Grace, he will have to capitulate to his mother and settle down in a marriage.

Simon pouts over his breakfast, which the housemaid, Dora, is late in bringing to him. Simon dislikes Dora; she is unlike the European servants of his wealthy childhood, "who are born knowing their place." While he waits for his breakfast, Simon attempts to write back to his mother. When he gets bored, he takes out Grace's portrait and reflects on his meeting with her. Grace was "straighter, taller, [and] more self-possessed" than he expected.

Simon's tense relationship with Dora will take on added significance later in the novel, when the reader finally becomes privy to Dora's view of Simon. Simon's derision of Dora highlights his bias against those who are not of his gender or his social class. This bias is confirmed by Simon's surprise at Grace's poise despite her background as a low-class servant and a convicted criminal.

Dora finally arrives with Simon's breakfast and Simon thinks, "Dora—Pig—Ham," noting the "associative tricks" his brain uses. He eventually returns to writing to his mother, struggling to describe the landscape of Kingston because "he has never known much about **flowers**."

This is another instance of Simon likening a woman to food; his comparison of Dora to a pig is particularly demeaning. This passage is also significant because it shows Simon's genuine interest in the origins of madness and how reason breaks down in the brain. This ironically foreshadows Simon's mental breakdown later in the novel. Finally, this passage highlights the importance as flowers as a symbol of female power.

CHAPTER 8

Grace is sewing in the Governor's house. She notes how, on days that she goes to the Governor's house, she is escorted by a pair of guards who sexually harass her, making hideous comments, such as when they say that it's best to have sex with a drunk woman—"out stone cold is best, then you don't have to listen to them." Sometimes Grace is able to channel Mary Whitney and say something biting to back to the guards. Grace is no longer allowed "the run of the house," because the Governor's wife is worried she will have another fainting fit. Instead she helps the laundress, Clarrie.

This passage highlights the appalling sexual harassment that Grace faces on an almost everyday basis. The guards' comments are an extreme form of society's widely-held belief that women should be largely silent and that their sexuality is not their own, but rather exists for the benefit of and at the whim of men. Grace's attempts to channel Mary Whitney's fiery personality also foreground the formative bond that Grace has with Mary, which will take on a significant role as the novel unfolds.

Dr. Jordan arrives to speak with Grace. Grace notes, "The door must be kept open at all times because there cannot be even a suspicion, no impropriety behind closed doors; how comical if they only knew what goes on every day during my walk here." Grace says that during Dr. Jordan's first two visits she has not talked much, because she hasn't conversed with someone in the past fifteen years of her imprisonment. Instead, Dr. Jordan has talked, telling Grace about how he grew up and about the young women who used to work in his father's mills. Grace saddens at the thought that she will never marry or have children, so she changes the subject.

Grace is pointing out the hypocrisy inherent in society's treatment of women. When Grace is in the Governor's house, acting as a sort of prop, her safety matters; however, when she is merely a woman on the street (even one who is still nominally in state custody), the fact that she is being sexually harassed is considered insignificant. This passage is also important because it is one of a few rare moments that Grace expresses sadness over the course her life has taken. She genuinely regrets the fact that she will never have a family of her own, which makes her a more empathetic character.

Eventually, Grace becomes comfortable talking to Dr. Jordan, and enjoys the feeling of watching him take notes, "as if hundreds of butterflies have settled all over [her] face, and are softly opening and closing their wings." However, Grace says, there is a feeling underneath this one, as of a peach being torn open, "and not even torn open, but too ripe and splitting open of its own accord. And inside the peach there's a stone."

Speaking to Dr. Jordan, after so many years of not having a companion to converse with, gives Grace a feeling of aliveness that is almost painful in its intensity. The peach imagery implies that not being able to tell her story has left Grace with a feeling of bursting, and that there is relief but also intense pain in finally being able to share her story.

CHAPTER 9

This chapter consists of a letter from Dr. Bannerling to Dr. Simon Jordan. Dr. Bannerling characterizes Grace as "an accomplished actress and a most practised liar" who has never actually been insane. Bannerling warns Simon to be wary of Grace if he decides to proceed with his interviews, saying, "Many older and wiser heads have been enmeshed in her toils."

Dr. Bannerling expresses clearly sexist views about Grace, depicting her as a sexual temptress and a liar. Bannerling's damning account of Grace is ironic, given the fact that Bannerling is an immoral character who sexually abused his own patient.

CHAPTER 10

Simon unwillingly dresses for a meeting with Reverend Verringer. He is dreading the meeting because he anticipates the Reverend will be self-important. However, Simon reminds himself that he must comport himself well, because "he is no longer rich, and therefore no longer entirely his own man."

This passage reveals Simon's pride in his upper-class background, and his resentment at not being able to control his own future due to a lack of finances—a restriction of agency that pales in comparison to the circumstances women like Grace have always faced.

On his way out of the house where he is lodging, Simon tries his best to avoid conversation with his landlady, Mrs. Rachel Humphrey. She delivers him a letter from his mother and Simon quickly leaves. He finds Mrs. Humphrey unappealing: "She's lonely," he thinks, "—as well she might be, married to the sodden and straying Major—and loneliness in a woman is like hunger in a dog." Simon mentally compares Mrs. Humphrey to one of "the better class of French whore," with whom he is familiar from his time studying in Europe. Simon also runs into Major Humphrey, who appears drunk. Simon thinks, "There must be a certain freedom in not having a good name to lose."

This passage is incredibly important, because it reveals Simon's bigoted view of women. His worry that Mrs. Humphrey will attach herself to him betrays his belief that women are inherently needy and not self-sufficient. This passage also hints at Simon's seedy past in Europe, which shows that despite his high-class origins, Simon is not above interacting intimately with "low-class" women when they are serving his sexual needs. Still, Simon's snobbery is evidenced by the fact that he feels the need to mentally specify that he has had relations with the better *class of French prostitutes. Simon's reflections on Major Humphrey are also noteworthy because they reflect the fact that Simon may feel an underlying sense of unease about the fact that his actions are in conflict with the morals that his social class is supposedly meant to embody.*

Simon arrives at the Reverend's house. Reverend Verringer is working on a petition in favor of Grace's release, and hopes that Simon can provide him with a favorable report of Grace's condition. The men discuss Grace's history—the Reverend notes that Grace was sexually abused by a Warden Smith who used to work at the Penitentiary—and Simon finds himself wondering if Reverend Verringer is in love with Grace. This, Simon thinks, would account for the Reverend's "indignation, his fervour, his assiduousness, his laborious petitions and committees; and above all, his desire to believe her innocent." The men part with the Reverend saying he looks forward to seeing Simon at the Governor's house within the next few days.

The Reverend is aware of the sexual abuse that Grace has experienced, but has done little more than pray with her in an effort to "heal the wounds caused to her." This suggests that he is not interested in actually reforming the prison or mental health systems; rather, he seems more focused on securing Grace's freedom than protecting her and other women prisoners from violation while in prison. Simon's reaction to the news of Grace's sexual assault—he refrains from asking for more details from the Reverend because he realizes "it might be considered prurient"—further underscores the fact that Simon's interest in Grace is driven as much by sexual curiosity as by genuine medical interest. Finally, the fact that Simon resolves that the Reverend must be in love with Grace shows that Simon seems to think that the only relationship that can exist between a man and a woman is one that is sexual or romantic in nature.

CHAPTER 11

Simon arrives at the Governor's house and meets the Governor's wife, who looks at him with a particular expression which he knows means "she is about to make him an unsolicited gift of her symptoms"—likely of a thyroid disease, he suspects. He thinks about the effect that his medical training has on women; Simon believes that women crave his medical knowledge, "knowledge with a lurid glare to it; knowledge gained through a descent into the pit." He thinks of himself as "one of the dark trio—the doctor, the judge, the executioner," who share "the powers of life and death."

Simon's opinion of himself as being one of an exclusive trio that holds the powers of both life and death is evidence of his high opinion of the medical profession. This stands in direct contrast with the behavior of not only other physicians such as Dr. Bannerling but of Simon himself, who seems more interested in the status of his profession—and the ability it affords him to exercise power over women—than in the responsible, respectful practice of medicine. This passage is also important because, over the course of the novel, Atwood will show (especially through her use of flower imagery) that the characters who actually embody the powers of both life and death are actually women.

The Governor's wife introduces Simon to Mrs. Quennell, a well-known Spiritualist and the leader of the weekly meetings the Governor's wife hosts at her home. Mrs. Quennell then introduces Simon to a Dr. Jerome DuPont. Simon snidely thinks that the people who practice Spiritualism, which involves communing with the dead, would be committed to an asylum "if [they] were not so well-to-do."

This passage introduces several movements of historical importance, demonstrating the tension that exists in Simon's society over not only the causes of mental illness but also the most effective ways to commune with and heal people's spirits, whether alive or dead. Simon's reflection that Spiritualists should be deemed mentally unstable suggests, yet again, his deeply entrenched prejudice against women, since, as Atwood points out in her afterward to the novel, Spiritualism was one of the few movements at this time that afforded women positions of leadership.

Simon and Dr. DuPont discuss DuPont's work; he characterizes himself not as a Spiritualist but as a neuro-hypnotist. The men converse about the nature of the mind, and they also discuss Simon's approach to his work with Grace (with Mrs. Quennell piping up to invite Simon to one of her weekly "spiritual Thursdays" meetings). Miss Lydia, one of the Governor's daughters, arrives to ask Simon if he has seen the Governor's wife's scrapbook, and Simon is relieved for the excuse to leave the conversation.

Simon and Dr. DuPont's conversation further explores the real historical conversation around mental health that was ongoing at the time the novel is set. Simon's feeling of annoyance at Mrs. Quennell and the Reverend's focus on the spiritual aspect of "sanity" is noteworthy, because his conviction that the spirit is of little importance will be challenged in a major way later in the novel.

Simon and Lydia peruse the scrapbook, which contains newspaper clippings of crimes. Lydia flirts with Simon, who thinks ruefully about his mother's indefatigable attempts to get him married. Eventually Reverend Verringer arrives and Lydia departs.

This passage evokes Simon's ongoing conflict with his mother over the question of his marriage. Simon enjoys flirting with Lydia, but feels frustrated at his mother's attempts to settle him in a respectable marriage, because he thinks such a life would be a sexless and boring one.

Left alone, Simon finds himself thinking of Grace, comparing her with Lydia. He thinks Grace, in comparison with the photo he's seen of her, "is now more than pretty. Or other than pretty." He reflects on a conversation he had with Grace several days ago, in which he urged her to be frank with him. She replied that she had no reason not to be, saying, "I was never a lady, Sir, and I've already lost whatever reputation I ever had." Simon asked if Grace cares about his good opinion of her, and she replied that she has already been judged. "Rightly or wrongly does not matter," she added. "People want a guilty person." Grace continued sewing and Simon recalls that, as he watched her thread her needle, "he felt as if he was watching her undress, through a chink in the wall; as if she was washing herself with her tongue, like a cat."

This passage firmly establishes the fact that Simon views his conversations with Grace in sexualized terms; his attempts to draw her out through conversation are erotically charged in his mind. This passage is also important for what it reveals about Grace: her conviction that her reputation has already been irreparably damaged seems to give her a kind of freedom—at least in Simon's eyes. Grace's comment that "people want a guilty person" will also complicate her future conversations with Simon, as it is possible Grace is deliberately conforming to people's idea of her. Seeing Grace through Simon's eyes is thus a means for the reader to more critically evaluate her narration in later chapters.

CHAPTER 12

It is the ninth day Grace has been visited by Dr. Jordan, and this time he has brought her a potato. Grace says, "Sometimes I think that Dr. Jordan is a little off in the head. But I would rather talk with him about potatoes, if that is what he fancies, than not talk to him at all." Grace talks to Dr. Jordan about the **quilt** she is working on for one of the Governor's daughters, and when he asks what pattern Grace would do on a quilt she'd make for herself, she replies noncommittally with several options. She admits that she knows exactly what kind of quilt she'd make—a Tree of Paradise—but that "saying what you really want out loud brings bad luck" and possibly even punishment. "This is what happened to Mary Whitney," she says.

Grace's offhanded comment that Dr. Jordan is "a little off in the head" is actually a radical statement, because it shifts the heavily gendered power dynamic between these two characters. Furthermore, Grace's assessment of Dr. Jordan's stability will come to be a kind of premonition, as Dr. Jordan gradually unravels over the course of the novel. The fact that Grace wants to talk to Dr. Jordan regardless of his mental wellbeing underscores the importance of conversation and storytelling as a source of comfort in Grace's life. Finally, this passage is noteworthy for the way it reveals Grace's strong sense of superstition—which also echoes her earlier statement that women's "hunger" is frequently used against them.

Dr. Jordan tries, to no avail, to prompt Grace to talk about what else one might find underground, aside from potatoes. (He is trying to prompt her to think of a cellar, since that is where Thomas Kinnear's and Nancy Montgomery's bodies were discovered.) He switches tactics and asks Grace about her dreams. She recalls her dream, in which she was at Mr. Kinnear's house and a peddler was trying to sell her a hand that is dripping blood. In the dream she worried about the woman who was missing the hand coming to find it, and also about the blood "get[ting] on the clean floor." To Dr. Jordan, however, Grace says that she doesn't remember what she dreamed, because she wants to keep her dreams private.

This passage is very important; even more than the vivid, suggestive imagery that Grace's dream consists of, the fact that Grace deliberately does not tell Dr. Jordan about her dream represents a subversive act, because Grace is asserting her right to her inner life in opposition to Dr. Jordan's claim on it. The passage also raises the possibility that in the same way that Grace is selectively sharing information with Dr. Jordan, she may also be using a similar "editing" process in the information she discloses to the reader. Thus, at the same time that Grace becomes a more nuanced, empathetic character as the novel progresses, she also becomes arguably more opaque.

Dr. Jordan asks Grace to begin telling her life story. Annoyed, she replies, "I was born, Sir, like anyone else." Dr. Jordan produces Grace's confession, saying he'll read it to her. She refuses, saying, "That is not really my Confession," but only what her lawyer told her to say and what journalists made up about her. Dr. Jordan asks about Grace's alias, and Grace responds that Mary Whitney was a friend of hers. "Without her," she says, "it would have been a different story entirely."

This passage underscores the importance of female friendship in Grace's life. As the reader will come to learn, Mary's death has a huge impact on Grace's identity and her future relationships, particularly the tense relationship between Grace and Nancy Montgomery. Grace's statement that the confession she gave isn't really *her confession also hints at the fallibility of the written word, and underscores the importance of Grace being able to narrate her own story, rather than having it interpreted through a male authorial lens.*

CHAPTER 13

Grace begins narrating her life story. "As they say, Sir," she tells Dr. Jordan, "you cannot choose your own parents, and of my own free will I would not have chosen the ones God gave me." Grace grew up in a village in Ireland. Her maternal Aunt Pauline (married to Grace's Uncle Roy) was convinced that her younger sister, Grace's mother, married below her and advises Grace to "set a high price" on herself when she marries. Grace says of her mother, "She'd begun life under Aunt Pauline's thumb and continued the same way, only my father's thumb was added to it."

This passage introduces Grace's mother, a woman whose death has haunted Grace even longer than that of Mary Whitney. Grace's relationship to her Aunt Pauline is also important because Aunt Pauline's marital advice to Grace has colored the way she conceives of her self-worth throughout her life. The phrase "a high price" reflects not only the economic reality of marriage at the time—women were a kind of commodity in the marriage market—but also the damaging social implications of this reality, which cause an aunt to see her very young niece as, fundamentally, an object. This passage thus powerfully suggests the way that a system that objectifies women limits their ability to conceive of themselves as full persons.

Grace describes her younger self as "a little pitcher with big ears." By eavesdropping she learned how much her father resented his wife and children, who he felt were "too many in number." (Grace had two older siblings and six younger. Her mother also had three stillborn children and one miscarriage.) Grace's father refers to his children as **mouths** to feed, and Grace comes to see pregnancy as "an unhappy condition followed by a happy event, although the event is by no means always happy."

This passage is significant in two ways. The first is that it gestures at the inherent hypocrisy of Grace's father; he blames his lack of financial success on his large family, even though he is the one who continues to impregnate his wife. Secondly, it reveals Grace's strong aversion to pregnancy and motherhood, which will be important in understanding her reaction to Mary Whitney's pregnancy and Nancy Montgomery's.

Grace's father, a stonemason by trade, was an alcoholic and struggled to find work. When a house is burnt down and a man killed, Grace's father comes under suspicion, though he is never arrested. Aunt Pauline and Uncle Roy begin supplying Grace's family with food, and Grace helps her mother with sewing to earn money. Eventually, Uncle Roy pays for Grace's family to immigrate to Canada. Aunt Pauline gifts Grace's mother with a **flower**ed teapot as a goodbye present.

The fact that Grace's father is suspected in a case of arson/murder is an intriguing detail—as Dr. Jordan will later point out, this may serve as evidence of the "hereditary nature of insanity," of which he himself is skeptical. More importantly, this passage shows that Grace had to work to support her family at a very young age, which explains not only her resentment of her father but also her skill at and love of sewing, which she learned from her mother.

CHAPTER 14

Grace and her family go to Belfast to board a ship to Canada. Grace's mother sees three crows sitting on the mast of the ship, and tells Grace it signals a death. "My foot will never touch land again," she tells Grace. Grace's family is all seasick; Grace describes the ship to Dr. Jordan as "a sort of slum in motion." Grace befriends a kind, elderly Catholic woman named Mrs. Phelan, who is sleeping in a neighboring bunk. As the ship enters an ice field, Grace's mother falls seriously ill with stomach pain, which the doctor says is likely a tumor or burst appendix. Grace tries to stay awake and keep watch over her mother, but when she awakens in the morning her mother is dead.

Grace's mother's death in the squalid conditions of the ship further underscores the way that social class defines a person's life—and even her death. The ship doctor's careless attitude is yet another example of the medical field's abdication of responsibility toward poor folks, particularly women. This passage is also important because Grace's mother's death will ultimately be paralleled by Mary Whitney's, with Grace sleeping through both deaths and internalizing an intense amount of guilt over the losses of the two most important women in her life.

Grace is in shock. She says, "all my grief became concentrated, so to speak, on the matter of [which] sheets" to use in her mother's burial. She finally decides to use the second best sheet the family has, and save the new one, since her mother had "always placed herself second best in life." Grace's mother is buried at sea, and Grace describes it as "worse than being put into the earth, because if a person is in the earth at least you know where they are."

Grace's heartbreaking narration of her childish logic about her mother's burial reflects the cultural power of a society that devalues women. As a young child, Grace has already inherited her mother's views of herself as a person of "second best" importance. Though Grace will develop her own ideas about her status as a woman and a servant, the fact that, as a child, her example of motherhood and marriage was so negative may help to explain why Grace is so averse to the idea of taking a male lover. This passage also subtly marks one of the first instances of Grace's notions of the afterlife; her worry about not knowing where her mother is after her sea burial implicitly encompasses the question of where her mother's soul has gone after death.

The final thing Grace tells Dr. Jordan about the sea voyage is that her mother's teapot, which had been hanging in a basket from the family's bunk, fell and broke. Grace was distraught, convinced that her "mother's spirit [was] trapped in the bottom of the ship because we could not open a **window**, and angry at [her] because of the second-best sheet." She tells Dr. Jordan, "I was only a young girl at the time, and very ignorant."

This moment is important because Grace's conviction that a window must be opened after a death—a notion she imbibes from her Catholic friend, Mrs. Phelan—will haunt her for the rest of her life. This speaks to the power of memory and the alluring comfort of superstition. Grace was not raised Catholic—in fact, she harbors some anti-Catholic prejudice—yet Mrs. Phelan's notion becomes an integral part of her belief system. This is likely due to the fact that Grace was young and bereaved, and clung to this idea for comfort—yet, the idea proves more torturous than comforting over the course of Grace's life. This passage thus wrestles with the complex question of why people believe what they believe.

CHAPTER 15

Grace and her family finally land in Quebec, where Grace buys onions for her siblings; the children are so hungry they eat the onions raw. The family then returns to the boat and continues to Toronto, where they disembark. In Toronto, Grace's father rents lodgings from a widow named Mrs. Burt. Grace intuits that Mrs. Burt is trying to "[make] a match" with her father, who in turn plays the role of bereaved widower. Grace knows that her father is only "working on [Mrs. Burt's] feelings because he was behind in the rent," having spent all his money on alcohol. Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "I believe it was only then that I truly began to hate him."

Grace claims to have begun hating her father when he tried to woo Mrs. Burt instead of earning money to pay off his late rent. This is a complicated claim, as it reflects Grace's resentment of her father on multiple levels: he is flirting with a woman almost immediately after the death of Grace's mother, and he has entirely abdicated his role as a parent and protector of his children. Though Grace does not explain why this was the moment when she first began to hate her father, it seems likely that, even at a young age, Grace was subconsciously aware of the gendered implications of her father's actions. Not only did her father's actions seem to register as disrespectful to her mother's memory, but it seems likely that Grace was also aware of the unfair way that her father was manipulating Mrs. Burt. Grace has apparently been a perceptive observer of social and gendered power dynamics from a young age.

Soon, Grace's father tells her it is time for her to "earn [her] own bread," though she is not even thirteen years old. Mrs. Burt is friends with a woman named Mrs. Honey, a housekeeper for Mrs. Alderman Parkinson. Grace receives a position, and is set to move to the Parkinson house in a week's time. She tells Dr. Jordan, "I was thankful I had to go away, because if not, it would soon have come to broken bones between myself and my father." Grace reveals that her father abused both her and her mother and that, at this time, she had begun to think about killing him. Finally the time comes for Grace to leave. She says a sorrowful goodbye to her siblings; her father is "not at home" when she leaves.

Grace's revelation that her father physically abused her and her mother is important on multiple levels. It highlights the fact that Grace has been a survivor of violence by men for virtually her entire life, which—if it does not directly atone for any involvement she might have had in the Kinnear-Montgomery murders—at least makes her a more empathetic character, as she has weathered countless forms of abuse. Additionally, this information is important because a later chapter in the novel will obliquely hint that Grace's father may have been guilty of sexually abusing her as well.

CHAPTER 16

This chapter consists of a letter from Simon to his friend Edward Murchie, with whom he was an undergraduate at Harvard. Simon congratulates Edward on his recent engagement, saying he envies him "for having a heart to bestow." Simon describes his visits with Grace, and how he has been "trying in vain to open her up like an oyster." He says that he is on the verge of going mad himself "out of sheer boredom." The only person whom he says he is interested in getting to know is Dr. DuPont, though he describes him as "a devotee of the Scottish crackpot Braid, and a queer duck himself."

Simon's lament that he possesses "a heart-shaped stone" reads as an excuse for his demeaning treatment of women, and his insistence on seeing them as sexual objects rather than as equals. Simon once again employs imagery that reduces Grace to a foodstuff; this imagery also once more involves Simon violently "opening" Grace—language that has sexually-charged overtones. Simon's feeling of boredom verging on "madness" will also be significant later as he gradually loses his grip on reality.

CHAPTER 17

One of the epigraphs that opens this section of the book is an excerpt from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 1855 poem *Maud*. It reads: "My heart would hear her and beat, / Were it earth in an earthy bed; / My dust would hear her and beat, / Had I lain for a century dead; / Would start and tremble under her feet, / And blossom in purple and red."

Tennyson's poem is narrated by a young man so in love with a woman called Maud—and so devastated by her untimely death—that he temporarily goes insane. This quotation reflects the narrator's eternal passion for Maud. In the context of Atwood's novel, this epigraph seems to suggest the deep bond shared by Grace and Mary Whitney, who dies in the last chapter of this section of the novel. As such, this quotation hints at the fact that Grace's feelings for Mary may have exceeded friendship; she may have been in love with her. Even if one does not interpret the novel this way, this epigraph undoubtedly speaks to the power of memory in showing how the memories of a loved one can linger on indefinitely even after that person's death.

Simon dreams of swimming in the sea, grasping onto objects floating by, "things that were his father's once, but sold after his death." He eventually sees his father, who is growing tentacles, "in the sinuous process of coming back to life." Simon awakens in the morning, realizing that his conversation with Grace has prompted this dream; "one father leads to another," he thinks.

Simon's dream suggests that he may have had a more complex relationship with his father than the reader is privileged to know about. This raises the question, then, of whether Simon is a reliable narrator. (Though Simon does not narrate in the first person, presumably the omniscient voice that does narrate Simon's chapters would know everything about Simon's life, were he a trustworthy character.) The fact that Simon attributes the subject of his dream to his earlier conversation with Grace also shows how much power Grace is beginning to have over not only Simon's conscious mind, but his subconscious as well.

Simon sits down to record his dream. Behind him, the door opens and he calls to Dora to leave his breakfast tray on the table. When he hears a crash, he turns around to find his landlady, Mrs. Humphrey, collapsed on the floor, covered in remnants of his breakfast. Simon carries Mrs. Humphrey to the bed in his room and revives her with smelling salts. As she lies unconscious on his bed, Simon has a vision of Mrs. Humphrey "kicking spasmodically, making faint mewing noises while being savaged by a hulking figure that bears no resemblance at all to himself; although—from above, and from the back, which is his point of view during this sordid scene—the quilted dressing-gown looks identical."

Simon's fantasy about Mrs. Humphrey amounts to a rape fantasy. This is disturbing in many ways, not least of which is the fact that Simon has consistently expressed distaste for, even derision of, Mrs. Humphrey—yet he still manages to see her in a sexual light. This further affirms the fact that Simon sees women fundamentally as sexual objects. The fact that his fantasy involves him overpowering Mrs. Humphrey (who is only semi-conscious at the time Simon has this fantasy) shows how intoxicated he is by the idea of having not only social but also physical power over women. All of this is made more unsettling by the fact that Simon is a physician, which means he has cause to care for unconscious women on an at least semi-regular basis. This fantasy—which Simon does not register as unusual or problematic in the least—is the first major example of why Simon is a far from trustworthy narrator, since he is incapable of seeing women for who they actually are, beyond their anatomy.

When Mrs. Humphrey regains consciousness, she tells Simon that she had to let Dora go, because she could not pay her. Major Humphrey took money from Mrs. Humphrey two days ago and she has not seen or heard form him since. Mrs. Humphrey solicits Simon's advice, and he advises her to contact a woman friend. "Women help each other;" he thinks; "caring for the afflicted is their sphere." Mrs. Humphrey replies that she has no friends, because she's new to Kingston and her husband discouraged her from having visitors. Simon suggests Mrs. Humphrey eat something, but since there is "nothing but water" in the house and Mrs. Humphrey is still weak, Simon finds himself shopping for food at the market.

Simon's notion that "caring for the afflicted" is a woman's job is ironic given his position as a physician. His desire to get Mrs. Humphrey off his hands also implies that he does not take her troubles seriously; he would rather foist her off onto another woman, someone he thinks would be more likely and able to sympathize with her. The details of this passage (namely Mrs. Humphrey's marriage to the Major) further highlight the socially disadvantaged position of women in this society. Finally, Simon's almost total ineptitude at shopping for food exposes the fact that his gender and social class have rendered him unable to meet his own fundamental needs without the help of (predominantly female) servants.

Simon returns with food and he and Mrs. Humphrey eat together. He asks Mrs. Humphrey whether there is something she can do to earn money and she says, "Women like me have few skills they can sell." Simon hears "a hint of malicious irony in her voice" and wonders, "Does she know what he was thinking as she lay unconscious on his unmade bed?" Almost involuntarily Simon finds himself offering to advance Mrs. Humphrey two months' rent.

Simon's conviction that he hears "malicious irony" in Mrs. Humphrey's voice is questionable. Given the fact that he is virtually unable to look at a woman—even one to whom he claims not to be sexually attracted—without having sexual thoughts, it seems plausible that Simon has invented this innuendo on the part of Mrs. Humphrey. Instead, it seems likely that Mrs. Humphrey might be depressed or even angry about the fact that the only recourse she has to support herself is prostituting her body. This moment again shows that the reader might not be able to rely on Simon's interpretation of the characters around him. Simon is thus just as unreliable a narrator—if not a more unreliable one, since his very profession should render him objective—than Grace. The alternating narration of the novel is thus operating on a meta-level to undermine the beliefs of the characters in the novel, who have been socially conditioned to see men as more objective, rational, and "sane" than women.

CHAPTER 18

Grace notices that Dr. Jordan "looks more disarranged than usual, and as if he has something on his mind." He asks after the new **quilt** Grace is working on, and she replies that it is a Pandora's Box pattern, which, she says, "puts [Dr. Jordan] in an instructive mood." Grace catches Dr. Jordan off guard when she reveals that she knows the story of Pandora's box. They discuss the concept of hope, but instead of saying that "[she has] been getting along without it for some time," Grace asks Dr. Jordan if he is ill. He replies that he is only "preoccupied," and asks Grace if she will continue her life story to help distract him. She obliges.

Grace yet again exceeds Dr. Jordan's expectations; she is more well-read than he expects her to be given her class status and her gender, not to mention her status as an incarcerated person. The fact that Grace refuses to truly engage Dr. Jordan in a full-on conversation about hope suggests that there are aspects of her inner life that she is unwilling to share with him. In fact, Grace seems reticent to share even with the reader any details about the hopelessness and despair she feels. Her quips thus mask a depth of feeling that Grace seems unwilling to fully admit perhaps even to herself.

Grace says that she has "come to a happier part of [her] story," where she will tell Dr. Jordan about Mary Whitney. Grace describes the Alderman Parkinson house, "one of the finest houses in Toronto," where she began work. Mr. Alderman Parkinson is never at home, because he is busy with his work in politics. Mrs. Alderman Parkinson is "an imposing figure," and, as Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "Mary Whitney said she ought to have been the Alderman herself, as she was the better man." The Parkinsons have two college-aged sons and they keep a large house staff. Grace is placed in a one-room bedroom with Mary Whitney, a laundry maid; the two live down the hall from the two chambermaids, Agnes and Effie. Effie's betrothed was deported for his involvement in the Rebellion, and Mary explains to Grace that her family was also involved; her father died hiding in the woods and her mother died of grief.

Mary Whitney is finally introduced in this passage. Mary's Radical family background, and her strong convictions about gender and class equality mark her as more assertive and politically vocal than Grace. Even at the time she is narrating to Dr. Jordan, Grace often makes qualifications about how transgressive Mary Whitney's views were. Mary thus acts as a kind of counterpart to Grace, expressing her views unequivocally where Grace tends to more subtly subvert societal norms—many of which she actively ascribes to unabashedly.

Grace says that she "liked [Mary] at once." Mary takes Grace under her wing and teaches her about her duties as a maid. Grace describes Mary as "a fun-loving girl, and very mischievous and bold in her speech when we were alone." She tells Dr. Jordan that it took her a while to become accustomed to Mary's coarse language; Grace says she eventually "put it down to her being a native-born Canadian, as she did not have much respect for degree." Grace recalls Mary's daydreams: "If she had half a chance she would run away to the woods, and go about with a bow and arrow, and not have to pin up her hair or wear stays; and I could come with her."

Mary's dislike of the physical constraints society places on women (in the form of their clothing) represents a broader challenge to the confinement of women's spheres based solely on their gender. In this way Mary also represents a kind of sexual liberation in her desire to reject society and return to nature. Though Grace does not explicitly say so, this passage might also be interpreted as evidence that Grace feels sexual attraction toward Mary.


Mary helps Grace bathe and wash her **clothes**. The two then go shopping in Toronto to purchase materials to make Grace "a decent dress." The next day, when a peddler named Jeremiah comes to the Parkinson house, Grace purchases thread and buttons from him. Jeremiah gives Grace an extra button in addition to the four she has purchased; "people of that kind," Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "consider four an unlucky number, and odd numbers luckier than even ones." He also tells Grace, "You are one of us." Grace admits that she was confused by this, but decided that Jeremiah "meant that [she] too was homeless, and a wanderer." Though the house feels "stale" after the excitement of Jeremiah's visit, Grace's dress turns out well and she finally looks "trim and respectable."

This passage reflects Grace's attraction to the way that clothes make her feel, which will become important later in the novel, when Grace takes the murdered Nancy's clothes. Being dressed well gives Grace a sense of confidence and place, which is especially meaningful to her given the fact that she does feel like a wanderer. This passage is also important because it introduces Jeremiah the peddler, a character with whom Grace feels a deep, inexplicable bond, and the only man to whom she admits feeling some level of attraction.


CHAPTER 19

At the end of each of Grace's first two months of work, her father comes to the Parkinson house and demands her wages. Each time, Mary defends Grace and sends her belligerent father away. Grace later tries to send Mrs. Burt some money for her younger siblings—"but," she tells Dr. Jordan, "I do not think they received it." Initially Grace works as a scullery maid, but she is soon transferred to working in the laundry with Mary, who helps her, teaches her, and makes her laugh. Mary insists that being a servant is "just a job of work," not a fate to which people are born. Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "Mary was an outspoken young woman, and did not mince words; and she had very democratic ideas, which it took me some getting used to."

Mary's protection of Grace serves as another example of Mary's refusal to be bullied by people who feel entitled. Her insistence that being a servant is just a job, rather than an identity, is difficult for Grace to wrestle with. Though Grace accounts for this by contrasting her European upbringing with Mary's more liberal Canadian background, it seems that Grace actually does see class status as an identity marker, despite her deep respect for Mary. This shows that, while Grace has a tendency to satirize social norms and point out the hypocrisies inherent in them, she still fundamentally ascribes to the class system in which she was raised.

Grace describes for Dr. Jordan how she and Mary did the washing. She recalls how, for fun, she and Mary used to try on Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's corsets "and walk around with [their] chests sticking out and looking down [their] noses." She also remembers unpacking the winter **quilts** at the Parkinson household. She tells Dr. Jordan, "When we'd hung a half-dozen of them up on the line, all in a row, I thought that they looked like flags, hung out by an army as it goes to war." Grace says that "these fancies about the quilts" only occurred to her once she was in prison. "It is a place where you have a lot of time to think," she says, "and no one to tell your thoughts to; and so you tell them to yourself."

The fact that Mary and Grace used to try on Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's clothing speaks to the way that trying on different clothes amounts to trying on different identities in the novel. Even more importantly, this passage reflects the way that Grace has matured in her thinking during her time in prison, a fact that reminds the reader that she has been imprisoned since she was only a teenager. Grace's nuanced beliefs about the power of quilts represents Atwood's authorial voice cutting through the narration, offering a feminist perspective on the power of women to form their own "armies" despite their political, social, and economic disenfranchisement.

Dr. Jordan asks Grace to pause so he can catch up in his notetaking. Watching him write, she thinks "it must be pleasant to have the knack of writing so quickly, which can only be done by practice, like playing the piano." Dr. Jordan tells Grace that he wants to hear anything she sees fit to tell him, saying, "The small details of life often hide a great significance." Though Grace is unsure how to interpret this comment, she continues to narrate her story.

Grace's comment about "the knack of writing" highlights the fact that the ability to write has an inscribed class value; a servant like Grace does not have the time to practice writing when she has to accomplish all of her other duties. Another important aspect of this passage is the differing value that Grace and Dr. Jordan seem to place on details. Dr. Jordan views details as clues to piecing together Grace's lost memory and determining her guilt (or innocence). Grace, on the other hand, seems to view details less for their practical value and more for their integral part in storytelling: their ability to paint a true picture of someone's life.

Grace and Mary take two of the winter **quilts** inside to mend them. One, Grace remembers, was done in an Attic Widows pattern, and she and Mary laughed over what the name could mean: "Mary said, And the boxes and chests in the attic would be stuffed to the brim with their dear deceased husbands' cut-off hair; and I said, And perhaps the dear deceased husbands are in the chests too." Grace follows this up by telling Dr. Jordan, "All I can say, Sir, is that we were young girls, and young girls are often silly in that way; and it is better to laugh than to burst."

Grace's understated claim that "it is better to laugh than burst" evokes a deep sense of frustration. Though she does not elaborate, it seems plausible that Grace and Mary felt suffocated by the narrowness of their lives and experiences as servants, and that their joking daydreams about dead husbands were an outlet for their sense of powerlessness at the hands of a sexist society. The fact that Grace tempers this social critique by saying that she and Mary were merely "silly" young girls only makes Grace's statement more powerful, because it shows how society is inherently dismissive of women's thoughts.

Grace gives a summary of the autumn at the Parkinson house. She remembers watching migrating geese with Mary in September, and Mary explaining to her what menstruation is when Grace got her first period in October. Mary told Grace that now that she was a woman, she must be careful about how she interacted with men. Grace notes, "now I saw that we were in the same story as the one Aunt Pauline used to tell about my mother." Grace also remembers a game she and Mary played on Halloween, peeling apples to determine the first initial of the men they'd marry. Grace got a letter J, but Mary was unable to successfully carve her apples and did not get a letter.

The most important aspect of this passage is Grace's realization that, even in Canada, she was living "in the same story as the one Aunt Pauline used to tell." This reflects the ways that women in Grace's society (on both sides of the Atlantic) constructed and shared narratives with one another as a means of self-protection. Ultimately Mary does not follow her own advice, and her inability to heed the moral of the "story" that other women have told her leads to her death. This moment thus underscores the way that women use storytelling as a survival tool, while also showing the tremendously unfair ways that society disadvantages women by making female sexuality a forbidden topic, and even a forbidden experience.

CHAPTER 20

Grace moves forward to narrating the month of December at the Parkinson household. Her father sends one of Grace's younger sisters to beg Grace for her wages; Grace gives her some money and never hears from her family again. Grace thoroughly enjoys Christmastime at the house. Misters Richard and George Parkinson come home from Harvard for the holidays; Mr. George stays on after catching a chill. He does not improve until February, by which point he decides to stay home and return to school in the fall term. Grace tells Dr. Jordan: "I am afraid he was very much indulged, not least by himself. For if the world treats you well, Sir, you come to believe you are deserving of it."

Grace's description of Christmas at the Alderman Parkinson house is noteworthy mainly because it subtly introduces the character of George Parkinson. Grace's brief critique of the way that one's social status can lead to a sense of entitlement will become crucial later on, when Grace discovers that George Parkinson is the father of Mary Whitney's child. This moment is also important in Grace's character development because it is one of the rare instances in which she offers an explicit critique of someone who is of a much higher class status than she. This is itself an indication of Grace's deep resentment of George Parkinson.

"Real winter" sets in and Grace begins to notice something is different about Mary; "her smell had changed, from nutmegs to salt fish," she says. When Grace discovers Mary collapsed by the outhouse, Mary finally reveals that she is pregnant. She refuses to tell Grace who the baby's father is, but reveals that she is very upset with him, as he had promised to marry her, but has since gone back on his promise. By May, Mary is desperate to do something, as the housekeeper, Mrs. Honey, is becoming suspicious. Grace convinces Mary to re-petition the baby's father for help; Mary does so, and is "angrier than she had ever been" when the father responds to her plea by giving her five dollars.

The fact that Grace clues in to Mary's pregnancy through a change in Mary's scent suggests an animalistic side to Grace's personality. This contributes to Grace's status as an almost mystical person, who is able to commune with deeper forces than other characters. This passage also reflects how harshly society punishes women who disobey the social code, which prohibits premarital sex. At the same time, the dismissive reaction of Mary's lover shows that society is much more willing to overlook male sexual transgression than female transgression of the same kind.

At a loss, Mary considers drowning herself, but instead arranges for an abortion. Before meeting with the "doctor," she writes out a will that reads: "If I die, my things are to go to Grace Marks." Grace accompanies Mary to and from the doctor's house. Mary is in intense pain after the procedure, and Grace sleeps on the floor that night, allowing Mary to have the bed to herself. When Grace wakes in the morning, Mary is dead. Grace goes to Agnes, one of the chambermaids, sobbing. Agnes fetches Mrs. Honey, who in turn fetches Mrs. Alderman Parkinson. Mrs. Alderman Parkinson presses Grace about the identity of Mary's lover, but Grace remains mum. To Dr. Jordan, she admits that she "had [her] own suspicions," strongly hinting that Mr. George Parkinson is the father of Mary's baby. Mrs. Alderman Parkinson decides that they will tell people Mary died of a fever. Grace does not mention the doctor from whom Mary received the abortion. To Dr. Jordan she says, "It is my true belief that it was the doctor that killed her with his knife; him and the gentleman between them."

This passage is significant in several ways. First, the fact that Mary wills Grace her possessions likens their friendship to the intense bond that might exist between parent and child, or even between spouses. Furthermore, Mary's will underscores the power of the written word, especially as one of the few ways that women can assert any ownership and agency over their material lives. Secondly, Mary's death is important on a plot level because Grace feels incredibly guilty for having fallen asleep while Mary died and having forgotten to open a window—a parallel of the death of Grace's mother. Thirdly, Grace's firm belief that both the abortion doctor and "the gentleman" (George Parkinson) are at fault for Mary's death represents a radical defiance of societal norms. In society's view, Mary is a disgrace and is responsible for her own death. Grace challenges this narrative by assigning blame to the man that aborted Mary's pregnancy and the one that impregnated her in the first place—a rhetorical move that directly links George Parkinson's penis to the doctor's knife, showing the inherent link between sex and violence in a society that does not allow women the freedom to explore and express their own sexuality.

Agnes helps Grace prepare Mary's body. Then Grace suddenly hears Mary's voice whisper, *Let me in*. Grace panics, realizing that she has not opened the **window**. She tells Agnes she's feeling ill and runs to open the window, thinking Mary's voice must have actually said *Let me out*. When Mary's body is prepared, the other servants come to see her, and Agnes tells the made-up story about Grace waking in bed next to Mary only to find her dead from a fever. Grace imagines what it would have been like to actually wake up next to her dead friend and, overwhelmed, she faints. "They said I lay like that for ten hours," she tells Dr. Jordan. Grace then briefly awakened, disoriented and asking, "where Grace had gone." She has to be restrained from running out of the house to search for Grace, who she says has "gone into the lake." She then again falls unconscious, and when she awakens again, she remembers who she is. Grace tells Dr. Jordan that she has "no memory of anything [she] said or did during the time [she] was awake, between the two long sleeps."

Grace's "two long sleeps" are important on a plot level, as is the fact that she hears Mary's voice saying, Let me in. Following the novel's climax, in which it is revealed that Mary Whitney's spirit has been possessing Grace, Grace's actions during her sleep will function in retrospect as evidence of the truth of this spiritual possession. This, of course, raises the question of whether Grace is telling the truth about hearing Mary's voice, as well as what happened when she was asleep. It seems impossible that Grace could have known she would at some point be hypnotized by Dr. DuPont and that she would have told Dr. Jordan this story as a way to lay the foundation for her claim of having been possessed. Yet Atwood leaves open the possibility that Grace may be fabricating this part—or any part—of her story.

CHAPTER 21

Simon leaves the Governor's house, shaken by Grace's story. He reflects that, though he has seen dead women as part of his medical training, "He has never caught them, as it were, in the act. This Mary Whitney, not yet—what? Seventeen? A young girl. Deplorable! He would like to wash his hands." Simon realizes he has stayed longer than normal at the Governor's house, and has half an hour before he is due at Reverend Verringer's house for dinner. He thinks about his medical training in London, where he learned that "Those who felt too deeply for the patient's suffering were the ones in whose fingers the knife slipped."

Simon's reflection on Grace's story shows that he has missed the point, and further highlights the fact that Simon has completely bought into the societal notion that female sexuality is taboo, dangerous, and even inherently grotesque. This is ironic, given the fact that Simon frequently spends his time indulging in his own graphic sexual fantasies about women. The fact that Simon feels so emotionally touched by Grace's story—even if his exact emotional response makes him seem more of an unsympathetic character—is important because it speaks to Grace's power as a narrator.

Simon spots Mrs. Humphrey and "wonders why she insists on dressing quite so much like a widow." He wanders to the lakeshore, recalling a childhood memory: he'd snuck into the room of one of his family's servants, and she had caught him "fondling one of her shifts." Simon and the girl had then kissed, the first time Simon kissed anyone. The memory of these "more innocent days" restores Simon's spirits.

Simon's memory of his first sexual experience highlights his sense of entitlement. Not only did he enter his servant's room and rifle through her intimate garments, but he also felt no qualms about kissing one of his family's employees. This memory is important because Simon recalls the encounter as consensual—in fact, he remembers the servant trying to undress him—but his previous depictions of women may cause the reader to question whether Simon is accurately recalling the event.

Simon arrives at the Reverend's house and the two men discuss Simon's progress with Grace. Simon shares that he has read Susanna Moodie's account of Grace and would like to meet with her. The Reverend advises Simon against a visit, saying that Mrs. Moodie, "like [her] sex in general," has a tendency to elaborate, and likely embellished much of her account. He counsels Simon to instead meet with Grace's lawyer, Kenneth MacKenzie, who is now working in Toronto and "has a sound head on his shoulders."

This passage is significant because it reflects how dismissive this society is of women authors. The Reverend's claim that Mrs. Moodie fabricated the details of her encounters with Grace will later become ironic when Simon discovers that it was actually Mr. MacKenzie who propagated false, sensational details of Grace's story.

The men sit down to dinner, joined by the Governor's wife and Miss Lydia, who Simon thinks looks like "a confection." He privately thinks that "she should be on the platter, instead of the fish." The Governor's wife and the Reverend attempt to convince Simon to give a lecture at one of the Governor's wife's Tuesday meetings. Her reluctantly agrees, swayed by Lydia's "admiration" and feeling like "he's been ambushed by a **flower**ing shrub."

Yet again, Simon conceives of a woman in less than human terms, picturing Lydia as an edible confection and as an entrapping plant. He agrees to speak at the Governor's wife's circle because Lydia encourages him, but he resents her for the power she holds over him, further demonstrating that Simon does not like when women influence his decisions or actions.

That night Simon dreams of being wrapped in a large sheet, which he then realizes is actually "the long fragrant hair of an unseen woman" wrapping around his neck and choking him. He awakens, remembering the dream as "painful and almost unbearably erotic."

Simon's dream provides important insight into the way that Simon himself links sex and violence. While later moments in the novel might suggest that Simon has particular sexual fetishes that involve bondage, it also seems plausible that Simon's obsession with pain and violence in a sexual context exceeds a normal variation of sexual preference. Though Simon is the one being suffocated in his dream, most of Simon's later fantasies involve him *exerting violent (usually nonconsensual) control over a woman. This suggests that instead of having a harmless fetish, Simon might actually be a dangerous, even predatory, figure.*

CHAPTER 22

Grace meets with Dr. Jordan, who has brought her a parsnip (trying unsuccessfully again to prompt her to think of a cellar). Grace tells Dr. Jordan she does not remember where she left off with her story, as a test to see if he has been listening. Dr. Jordan replies that Grace left off with Mary's death, and Grace resumes her story.

The fact that Grace once again pretends to not know something she actually knows shows how skilled she is at manipulating society's low expectations of her. It also underscores the pleasure and pride Grace takes in finally having someone listen to her complete account of her experiences, showing the importance of storytelling in the formation and affirmation of self-identity.

Because Mary has written a will, Grace is able to inherit her few possessions, many of which she sells to Jeremiah the peddler. Agnes helps Grace arrange Mary's burial. After Mary is buried, Grace lays **wildflowers** on her grave every Sunday.

The fact that Mary's will is honored represents one of the few times in the novel that a woman successfully controls her own story. Grace's devotion to Mary even after death symbolizes the love Grace has for her friend. Indeed, the fact that Grace takes flowers to Mary's grave on Sundays further deepens this devotion by subtly linking it to a kind of religious ritual.

Grace leaves the Parkinson house soon after Mary's death, bouncing around from job to job. While she is working at the house of a Mr. Watson, Grace meets Nancy Montgomery, a childhood friend of Mr. Watson's cook. Nancy tells Grace that she is housekeeper for a Mr. Thomas Kinnear, who lives in Richmond Hill, outside of Toronto. Nancy says she is in need of another servant, and she is also "lonely for some female company." Though she does not fancy the idea of moving to the country, Grace accepts Nancy's offer to wait a week before deciding whether she's interested in the position. Later, Mr. Watson's cook tells Grace she "[doesn't] know if it [is] a suitable position for a young girl," but refuses to elaborate. Grace, lonely for Mary and convinced that Nancy resembles her, decides to accept the position at Mr. Kinnear's.

The hint from Mr. Watson's cook about the Kinnear household not being "suitable" is the first hint in the novel that there is something inherently subversive about Mr. Kinnear's lifestyle. In fact, it turns out that Mr. Kinnear is known for seducing his servants and that he is currently treating his housekeeper, Nancy, as his mistress. Grace will have much to say about the propriety of this arrangement as the novel progresses. Grace's decision to take the job at Mr. Kinnear's is also noteworthy because it shows how bereft Grace feels without female friendship; in fact, this passage suggests that Nancy feels the same way. This makes the fact that Nancy and Grace's relationship is destroyed by personal and class-based jealousies more tragic, because this passage hints wistfully that a different version of the story could have existed, in which Nancy and Grace actually became friends.

CHAPTER 23

Grace makes the long journey to Richmond Hill. She has very few possessions, but she brings with her an old shawl of her mother's and a blue **flowered** handkerchief left to her by Mary Whitney. During the journey, the man sitting next to Grace in the coach badgers her and presses himself against her. Grace tells Dr. Jordan that the man was drunk and "when they are in that state it is just as well not to provoke them," so she didn't say anything.

The brief appearance of Mary's handkerchief is important to note, because this is the handkerchief with which Nancy is ultimately strangled. The passage also shows how women like Grace are constantly subjected to sexual harassment, and how they have no recourse to combat it.

Grace arrives in Richmond Hill at an inn, where her neighbor from the coach tries to assault her. Jeremiah the peddler shows up and defends Grace. Soon thereafter, Mr. Kinnear arrives to fetch Grace. Dr. Jordan interrupts to ask Grace what Mr. Kinnear looked like, and when she gives a simple, succinct answer he replies, "You did not observe him very particularly!" Grace responds, "I would have needed to turn my whole head, because of my bonnet. I suppose you have never worn a bonnet, have you Sir?"

Plot-wise, this moment is important because it represents another reason why Grace feels indebted to and fond of Jeremiah. On a thematic level, Grace's response to Dr. Jordan's rebuke of her as a storyteller represents a critique of the way that society restrains women from observing and interacting with their society. Though Grace knows that Dr. Jordan fancies himself her instructor (such as when he tried to teach her about Pandora's Box), this moment shows that Grace is actually instructing him, *opening his eyes to the harsh realities that women face in a society structured to disempower them.*

Mr. Kinnear drives Grace to his home in his wagon. When they arrive, Grace hears chopping from the back of the house (which she notes is smaller than Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's). She is introduced to a "shy and awkward" boy of fourteen named Jamie. She then spots Nancy cutting **flowers** in front of the house; Nancy waves to Grace but, Grace says, "she made no move to come over to me; and something squeezed tight about my heart." Finally, a man holding an axe emerges from behind the house; Nancy orders the man, whom she calls McDermott, to show Grace to her room. Jamie trails along, asking questions that Grace is too tired to answer. "It is strange," Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "to reflect that of all the people in that house, I was the only one of them left alive in six months' time."

Grace's comment on the relative size of Mr. Kinnear's house reveals her bizarre sense of snobbery, which will ultimately become a huge contributor to her dislike for Nancy. This passage is also important because of Grace's powerful emotional association with her first memory of Nancy, in which she feels that Nancy snubbed her. Though Grace does not elaborate on the heart-squeezing feeling she had this first day at Mr. Kinnear's, it seems likely that she was immediately disappointed in Nancy for not giving her the kind of welcome she would have expected of Mary (or even, perhaps, her mother). This moment thus seems to suggest that Nancy never could have measured up to Grace's expectations for her, and that the ghost of Mary Whitney almost literally blocked Grace and Nancy from ever becoming friends.

CHAPTER 24

While Grace is unpacking her things in her new room, Nancy arrives to greet her. Grace notes that Nancy wore a pair of gold earrings at the time and that she "wondered how she could afford them, on the salary of a housekeeper." Nancy gives Grace a full tour of the house. Grace particularly enjoys meeting Charley Horse in the stables. She also sees McDermott there; Nancy comments that "he is more surly than ever" and that it will be "a smile or the open road for him, or more likely the bottom of a ditch." Grace admits that she "hoped he had not overheard" Nancy laughing at him like this. Later on the tour, Nancy explains that Jamie Walsh is a neighborhood boy who runs errands for Mr. Kinnear. She also shows Grace the bedrooms in the houses, and Grace finds herself "wonder[ing] at [Nancy's] chamber being on the same floor as Mr. Kinnear's," but reminds herself that Mr. Kinnear's house is less grand than Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's and that there is no third floor or attic for the servants' lodgings.

All of Grace's observations in this passage reflect her strong sense of the importance of social class. Grace is repulsed by the way Nancy flouts convention by dressing above her station and sleeping on the same floor as her master's room. Furthermore, this passage is notable because it suggests that despite the fact that McDermott is rude to Grace from the moment he met her, she still feels a sense of loyalty to him because they are from the same social class, and they both act like it, unlike Nancy.

Dr. Jordan, reading aloud from Grace's confession, comments, "And then everything went on very quietly for a fortnight," to which Grace assents. When Dr. Jordan asks what Grace's daily life was like, Grace realizes with surprise that he is not joking. She thinks that men like Dr. Jordan "are like children, they do not have to think ahead, or worry about the consequences of what they do." She excuses them, however, as this "is only how they are brought up."

This moment starkly demonstrates the class-based differences between Grace's life and Dr. Jordan's. Grace inverts the power dynamic between herself and Dr. Jordan by likening him to a child, thus placing herself in a position of greater knowledge and experience. The fact that Grace is willing to excuse Dr. Jordan's ignorance about the lives of servants—the very people who made his own privileged childhood possible—suggests that Grace views a person's social class ("how they are brought up") as an integral part of their identity.

CHAPTER 25

Grace rises at dawn her first morning at Mr. Kinnear's house. She uses the privy, and prepares the breakfast things in the kitchen. She then sneaks some carrots to the horses and milks the cow. From the barn, she hears the loud noise of "McDermott, step-dancing on the bare boards of the loft," which she finds very odd. Grace continues her morning duties and has a brief conversation with McDermott when he is washing his face in the yard; their exchange leads her to determine that "keep[ing] a cordial distance [from McDermott] would be best."

This passage introduces Grace's love for animals, which not only heightens the notion that she might have a sort of "sixth sense," but also poignantly underscores how desperate she is for a sense of connection. As Grace finally begins to describe her time at Mr. Kinnear's house, the question of whether Grace is actually recalling and representing events accurately becomes even more important.

Nancy comes down to the kitchen while Grace is making tea. When Grace prepares to take Mr. Kinnear's tea upstairs, Nancy insists that she will take it. Grace, surprised, retorts that it is "a job for the maids," not the housekeeper, and a displeased Nancy allows her to proceed upstairs.

This is the first indication that Nancy and Grace will butt heads eventually. Grace's retort is more surprised than defiant, as she genuinely does not understand why Nancy would want to perform a task that is below her position. This re-emphasizes how important class standing is to Grace, while at the same time highlighting her naïveté regarding Nancy's relationship with Mr. Kinnear.

Later that day Grace and Nancy have their "first falling out" while Grace is "doing up Mr. Kinnear's room." Grace explains to Dr. Jordan that it is difficult for "a woman who has once been a servant herself" to work as a housekeeper, because "servants will have their own ways of doing things." To distract Nancy from her "fidgeting," Grace asks her about a picture on Mr. Kinnear's wall of a woman bathing in a garden. Mr. Kinnear comes in as the women are arguing over whether the painting depicts a scene from the Bible. Mr. Kinnear explains that the painting is of Susannah, whose story is recorded in the Apocrypha, a compilation of stories from Biblical times; this validates Grace's assertion that Susannah's story was not in the Bible. Mr. Kinnear's praise of Grace's intelligence angers Nancy.

Grace's narration of her first argument with Nancy suggests that there are two kinds of tension between the women. Grace characterizes the first as a natural tension that stems from the fact that Nancy herself used to be a servant. The second tension comes from Nancy's proprietary sense of her relationship to Mr. Kinnear, and her jealousy of his praise of Grace. Grace is not explicit about how Mr. Kinnear's praise made her feel, although she seems to have enjoyed sparring with him about the meaning of the Susannah story. More importantly, Grace claims that Mr. Kinnear's comment to Nancy that Grace is "no simpleton" is evidence that Nancy has been belittling Grace's intelligence. This *definitively angers Grace, and seems to deepen her sense that Nancy is acting out of turn by thinking herself so superior.*

Mr. Kinnear then tells the women he noticed a shirt of his was missing a button, and Grace notes that "Nancy had been in the wrong twice, for that shirt must have been washed and ironed by her, before I was ever anywhere near." Grace tells Dr. Jordan that when Nancy had hired her she'd hoped they'd be "like sisters or at least good friends," and she realized by the end of her first day "that this was not the way things were going to be."

This addition to Grace's story begins to raise the question of whether Grace is manipulating her account of Nancy. Grace seems to be casting Nancy as the villain, blaming her for the fact that the two women were not "like sisters." In turn, the question of the reliability of Grace's narration raises questions about the nature of female friendship, and whether women are "prone" to jealousy. Grace seems to have no problem depicting Nancy as jealous, while absolving herself of this feeling; yet she also seems to deeply regret the antipathy between herself and Nancy. For the first of many times, the question of how Grace truly felt and feels about Nancy Montgomery is at the forefront of the novel.

CHAPTER 26

Grace tells Dr. Jordan that "Nancy was very changeable, two-faced you might call her, and it wasn't easy to tell what she wanted from one hour to the next." On her second day at Mr. Kinnear's house Grace does the wash, spending considerable effort on getting snuff, ink, and grass stains out of one of Nancy's petticoats. While she is admiring her work, Jamie Walsh comes around the corner; he tells Grace he'll be running errands in town and asks if she needs anything, to which she replies in the negative. Nancy invites Jamie to return later in the day to play his flute for them.

This passage again highlights Grace's naïveté; the reader is able to intuit that Nancy's skirt is stained with snuff, ink, and grass because she had sex somewhere with Mr. Kinnear. The young Grace, however, is unable to see this—perhaps because of her age, perhaps because of her strong sense of class divisions, and perhaps because, at the time, Grace did not know the whole story, as the reader already does from having learned the facts of the murders early on in the novel.

While Nancy takes her meal in the dining room with Mr. Kinnear, Grace has to "make do with McDermott." She "set[s] to work to draw him out," and he soon shares his life story. McDermott was also born in Ireland, and served in the army in both England and in Canada after he immigrated. When he was hired by Nancy, McDermott expected he'd be serving as a personal servant to Mr. Kinnear, as he had done for a captain in the army, "but was annoyed to find that a woman was set over him instead." Grace believes McDermott's story, but later realizes, based on the details he provided, that he must have lied to her about his age.

McDermott's life story is important because it functions as a story within a story. Thus, it raises the question of whether Grace *is telling the truth about McDermott having lied about his age. There are multiple levels at which the reader could question the veracity of this passage. On the one hand, Grace might be deliberately depicting McDermott as sullen and a liar to bias Dr. Jordan in her favor. On the other hand, McDermott could actually have been a bitter, misogynistic braggart.*

McDermott starts to "make sheep's eyes" at Grace, asking questions about her romantic life and making suggestive comments. When Grace tells him "that what sort of girl [she] might be" is none of his business, McDermott sulkily leaves to chop wood. Grace carries on with her work, and while she is outside churning butter and doing some mending, Mr. Kinnear passes by and makes some flirtatious comments. Nancy later comes out and tells Grace that Mr. Kinnear is on his way to Toronto on business. First he will stop to dine at a friend's house, "whose wife is away from home, and the two daughters as well, so he can visit safely, but when she is there he is not received." Grace is surprised and questions Nancy, who responds only by saying that some people consider Mr. Kinnear "a bad influence."

Yet again, Grace is subject to harassing comments about her personal (sexual) life at the hands of not only her fellow servant but also her employer. While narrating, Grace seems to be more annoyed with McDermott's liberties than with Mr. Kinnear's, which suggests that she thinks Mr. Kinnear entitled to certain "privileges" with his female servants. Or, perhaps Grace welcomed Mr. Kinnear's flirtation because she was actually attracted to him. Another important aspect of this passage is Nancy's revelation that Mr. Kinnear is an outcast from respectable society. Though this confuses Grace in the moment, she will not hesitate to express her opinions on Mr. Kinnear and Nancy's relationship later on, after she has realized the extent of it.

Nancy helps Grace with the butter and they discuss Mr. Kinnear's tense relationship with his half brother, who still lives in their native Scotland. While the women are working, McDermott begins "running along the top of the snake fence, agile as a squirrel." Nancy tells Grace that he is just showing off, but Grace is still secretly impressed. Later, Jamie Walsh comes by with his flute and the women sit and listen to him play. Eventually McDermott comes to listen as well, and Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "the evening was so beautiful, that it made a pain in my heart" and that she wished that the moment could last forever.

Grace's memory of this night as so beautiful that it caused her pain seems likely to be a result of hindsight—yet it also seems plausible that because Grace's life until this point was so full of loss, she was not able to fully experience happiness, even before the murders changed her life forever. This is thus a detail that contributes to making Grace a character worthy of the reader's compassion, in addition to skepticism.

Night falls and everyone prepares for bed. Nancy asks Grace to sleep with her because she is afraid of sleeping alone when Mr. Kinnear is not at home. Grace asks if Nancy is afraid of McDermott, and Nancy replies that "from what she could make out from the look in his eyes" Grace should be more afraid of him than she. Grace responds that she is "more afraid of the old rooster in the henyard" than McDermott, and she and Nancy go upstairs to bed "in a very companionable fashion."

This is a rare moment that Nancy and Grace demonstrate solidarity, united by their shared dislike of McDermott. This moment is also important because of Nancy's assertion that McDermott's "look"—presumably one of infatuation—means Grace should be scared of him. This explicitly indicates that men are a danger to women, even (or perhaps especially) when they are in love with them.

CHAPTER 27

Grace wakes in the prison and dresses for breakfast, though she must first attend a whipping. At breakfast another inmate pinches Grace in an effort to make her scream, which would likely cause the guards to think Grace was having a fit. The day before, the same inmate called Grace a "doctor's pet" and "spoiled whore." Grace says that she has resolved to forgive the inmate, saying, "I do not think she is right in the head."

Grace's compassion for the woman who bullies her in prison shows a tender side of her character. It also raises the question of what constitutes (in)sanity—Grace is thought insane by many of the other characters in the novel, yet she herself thinks of her fellow prisoner as being mentally compromised. Furthermore, the fact that Grace responds to this woman's "madness" with kindness contrasts sharply with the cruelty and sexual abuse Grace suffered at the hands of her doctors during her stay at the mental asylum.

Grace is escorted by two guards to the Governor's house. The guards make horrendous sexual comments to Grace, and one of them gropes her. They also tease her about McDermott's death by hanging, which Grace thinks is "bad luck [...] for the dead don't like being laughed at."

The guards' graphic language shows how Grace is considered nothing more than a sexual prop by the very people who are meant to be protecting her. This parallels the abuse Grace endures at the hands of Dr. Bannerling. Furthermore, Grace's conviction that the dead don't like being laughed at shows not only her superstitious side, but also seems to imply that Grace herself has some kind of connection to the dead and can interpret their desires.

At the Governor's house, Grace spends the morning mending lace. Dr. Jordan arrives, this time without any "item," such as a vegetable. Dr. Jordan tells Grace he has decided to ask her what she would like him to bring, but in the meantime he would like to know about her dreams. Because Dr. Jordan looks "forlorn," Grace takes pity on him and shares a dream she had about red **flowers**. After sharing her dream, Grace tells Dr. Jordan that she's decided she would like him to bring her a red radish, to which he agrees. As Dr. Jordan leaves, Grace promises to recall her dreams if it will help him with his "trouble"; when he responds in confusion, Grace explains, "those who have been in trouble themselves are alert to it in others."

Grace again demonstrates her compassion in her treatment of Dr. Jordan. This moment also highlights the power of storytelling; Grace shares her dream with Dr. Jordan as a form of healing and comfort. This passage is also important because Grace's request for a radish shows an evolution in her relationship with Dr. Jordan; before, she hesitated to even eat an apple in front of him, but now she is comfortable enough to request a specific "gift." This detail further emphasizes the power that sharing one's story has to make a person feel connected to her listeners/audience.

After Dr. Jordan leaves, Miss Lydia comes in and tells Grace she has "an admirer" in Dr. DuPont. Grace suspects that this doctor "views [her] as a sight to be seen," but Lydia explains that he is a serious man who practices neuro-hypnotism. The conversation then turns to Dr. Jordan; Lydia is excited that he will be speaking at her mother's Tuesday circle, and asks if Grace will sew her a new dress. Grace agrees, but thinks that "there will be trouble ahead; as is always the case, when one loves, and the other does not."

Grace's instant skepticism and resentment of Dr. DuPont attests to the mistreatment she has experienced at the hands of physicians who have treated her as a mere object or spectacle. This passage also provides further evidence of Grace's ability to intuit other characters' feelings, which contrasts with her younger self, who was less adept at interpreting men and women's sexual/romantic desires.

CHAPTER 28

The next day Dr. Jordan brings Grace a radish he bought at market. He tells Grace he has begun digging a kitchen garden; Grace says, "Now that is a thing I envy." As a "return gift" for the radish, Grace resumes her story with the goal of making it "as interesting as [she] can, and rich in incident."

The fact that Grace covets a garden of her own shows the important role that ownership plays in a person's sense of individuality and personhood. This moment is also important because Grace makes Dr. Jordan a gift of her storytelling. Not only does this reveal yet another aspect of how storytelling functions between people, but it also raises the question of whether Grace is going to/has been manipulating her story to make it interesting, rather than accurate. In itself, this brings up the question of which act would be the "right" one on Grace's part: telling Dr. Jordan the "truth," or telling him what he so desperately wants to hear.

Grace picks up with the night she and Nancy went to bed together because Mr. Kinnear was on business in Toronto. She says that as Nancy was turning off the light "she sighed, and it was not the sigh of a happy woman, but of one who is trying to make the best of things." Mr. Kinnear returns on Saturday; he has met with two acquaintances on the way home and invited them to dinner. A flustered Nancy asks Grace to find McDermott and tell him to kill a chicken. Grace cannot find McDermott, and when she returns to Nancy, Nancy orders her to kill the chicken herself. Grace begins to cry, and Nancy shakes and slaps her and pushes her out into the yard. There, Jamie Walsh offers to kill the chicken and Grace gratefully accepts. Nancy comes out and teases Grace about Jamie's crush, and Grace realizes "she [is] trying to be friends again, after having lost her temper."

This is a complicated moment. Grace's absolute panic at the prospect of having to kill the chicken makes it seem unlikely that she could have ever brought herself to kill Nancy. Yet it is once again possible that Grace is manipulating the details of her story—or, that Grace didn't mind strangling Nancy because it did not involve blood (to which Grace will consistently express an aversion). On a plot level, it is important that Jamie kills the chicken for Grace, because it strengthens the friendship between the two of them. On a thematic level, Nancy's violence toward Grace—which is itself a reaction to Grace's reluctance to commit violence against the chicken—suggests that violence can arise from frustration rather than malice. Depending upon the reader's interpretation, this might have implications for the question of whether Grace actually strangled Nancy.

Mr. Kinnear's friends arrive for dinner, and Nancy has Grace wait table. Mr. Kinnear's friends crudely tease Grace about her attractiveness, telling her she should "look to [her] fine blue eyes, or Nancy might scratch them out, if old Tom so much as wink[s] at [her] sideways." Grace hopes Nancy has not overheard.

Besides showing yet again that Grace is sexually harassed by men of every class status and profession, this moment is important because of what it says about Grace's relationship with Nancy. There are several ways to interpret Grace's hope that Nancy has not overheard the dinner conversation. Grace could be enjoying the gentlemen's implication that Mr. Kinnear is attracted to her. Or, she could resent it and wish only that Nancy hasn't heard so that she won't punish Grace for attention she doesn't want.

On Sunday, Nancy asks Grace to accompany her to church, lending her a dress, bonnet, and gloves. Grace notices that no one greets Nancy and that people seem to be whispering when she passes. Grace deems the people hypocrites and bad neighbors.

Grace's experience at church speaks to her sense of Christian ethics. She looks down on the other church goers, deriding them for only caring about God's opinion when they're dressed up for the service, rather than practicing compassion for others in their daily lives. Grace's opinion of the congregation's treatment of Nancy will reverse when she learns about Nancy's affair with Mr. Kinnear.

Later in the week McDermott tells Grace that Nancy has given him his one month's notice. He claims he "[does] not care to stay any longer with such a parcel of whores." Shocked, Grace asks for clarification. McDermott tells Grace that Mr. Kinnear and Nancy are sleeping together and that they "[live] in secret as man and wife." He also says that it is "common knowledge" that when she worked at a different house, Nancy became pregnant "by a young layabout who ran off and left her"; the baby died. He adds that "a woman once on her back [is] like a turtle in the same right, she [can] scarcely turn herself right side up again, and [is] fair game for all." Grace realizes the "meaning of the averted heads at church" and resolves to go "about the house like a spy." She feels ashamed for letting herself be "imposed upon in this fashion, and for being so blind and foolish."

Grace is so shocked at learning of Nancy and Mr. Kinnear's affair that she hardly seems to notice McDermott's misogynistic and dehumanizing comments about Nancy. It seems that Grace might actually agree with McDermott's characterization of Nancy as a whore, though it is difficult to say for sure. Grace certainly resents being made a fool of—she thinks that her kindness towards Nancy has been misplaced, because Nancy does not deserve her respect. Thus Grace's reaction to this news is complicated, since Nancy's story almost directly parallels Mary Whitney's. Perhaps Grace's sense of horror at the impropriety of Nancy's affair comes from the fact that Nancy is not only having sex with a gentleman, as Mary did, but that she is assuming the privileges of his wife, by wearing fancy clothes, and dining and sleeping with Mr. Kinnear as if they were actually married. It seems, then, that Grace's resentment toward Nancy is rooted in her feeling that Nancy has violated class norms.

CHAPTER 29

Grace begins to have arguments with Nancy. "But," she says, "I so far remembered my place as not to strike her back; and if I'd held my tongue, my ears would have rung less often." McDermott becomes "more brooding and vengeful" and tells Grace that the two of them should "join together and demand [their] rights." Grace tells Dr. Jordan that "the best thing at such times was just to nod and agree with him, and to take no further notice."

At the same time that Grace is repulsed by McDermott, she is unable to fully shake a sense of loyalty to him, rooted in the fact that they are of the same class. Whereas Grace had earlier felt close to Nancy because of their shared dislike of McDermott, Grace now seems more inclined to feel close to McDermott because of their *shared dislike of Nancy. This raises the question of whether Grace is more fundamentally invested in her class identity or her gender identity. The fact that she must choose shows how deeply divided her society is, along multiple, intersecting lines.*

Dr. Jordan interjects to say that in McDermott's confession, he stated that it was Grace who wanted to murder Nancy and Mr. Kinnear, by poisoning their food. Grace replies, "Just because a thing has been written down, Sir, does not mean it is God's truth." Dr. Jordan laughs and asks Grace what she thinks of McDermott's claim. Grace "allow[s] [herself] to smile," and says, "If I wanted to put poison into a bowl of porridge, Sir, why would I have needed any help from such as him?" Dr. Jordan asks why McDermott might have said such a thing, and Grace responds that he likely wanted her company on the "lonely highway" to death. "I would never blame a human creature," she says, "for feeling lonely."

Again, Grace's compassion shines through in her assessment of McDermott's loneliness. This passage is also noteworthy because Grace explicitly acknowledges the fact that she "allows" herself to smile. This is a curious detail, because it indicates that there is a highly performative aspect to Grace's interviews with Dr. Jordan. Finally, Grace's comment about the porridge not only represents a radical assertion of her own power, but also reveals her dark sense of humor, which is at once captivating and slightly horrifying.


In the narrative of Grace's past, the next Wednesday is Grace's sixteenth birthday. Nancy tells Grace she can have her afternoon free; Grace suspects this is because Nancy wants to be alone with Mr. Kinnear for the day. As Grace is leaving to go on an afternoon walk, McDermott insists on accompanying her, "birthday be damned." Grace refuses his advances and flees the kitchen.

The fact that Grace is barely sixteen and having to fend off advances from McDermott, who is several years her senior, drives home the harshness of her world. Nancy giving Grace her afternoon off shows how regimented Grace's life as a servant is, and how much of a gift it is for her to have her time to herself.

Grace walks to the orchard, feeling very lonely. Listening to the birdsong, she reflects "that the very birds were strangers to [her], for [she] did not even know their names," and she begins to cry. She tries to console herself with the beauty of her surroundings and her belief in "a benevolent God," but she admits to Dr. Jordan that "thoughts about God often make [her] drowsy" and that she had proceeded to fall asleep in the orchard.

In this poignant passage, Grace explicitly wrestles with her religious beliefs. The fact that she is unable to take pleasure in the beautiful day also suggests how deeply depressed she is, and serves as a reminder of how friendless her life has been since Mary Whitney's death.

Grace awakens because she feels she is being watched. She sees a man standing near her and screams, but then realizes the man is actually young Jamie Walsh. Jamie asks why Grace is sad, and she replies that she is without friends. Jamie assures Grace that he is her friend, and tells her that he hopes to marry her someday. Grace is amused, given that Jamie is younger than she, but she responds gently. Jamie offers to play for Grace on his flute and the two then make daisy chains together. When she returns to the house, Grace finds Mr. Kinnear on the verandah; he asks whom Grace was with in the orchard. Later, McDermott also accuses Grace of "rolling about in the grass, and kissing the errand boy." Grace feels sad and angry at the thought that "[her] afternoon had not been [hers] at all, and not a kind and private thing, but had been spied upon by every one of them."

In narrating this scene, Grace herself marks how strange it is "that a girl of fifteen or sixteen is accounted a woman, but a boy of fifteen or sixteen is still a boy." This moment speaks to the fact that, at the same time that Grace's society denies female sexuality, it also sexualizes girls at an extremely young age. Note also the anger Grace feels at having been spied on by all three men at the Kinnear household: Jamie, Mr. Kinnear, and McDermott. This is a reminder that men in Grace's society feel entitled to every aspect of women's existence, from their bodies to how and with whom they spend their free time. Grace's sense of violation and indignation that her afternoon was not allowed to be "a kind and private thing" further highlights how important it is for women to be allowed ownership of their experiences.

CHAPTER 30

Several days pass; Grace has been at Mr. Kinnear's for almost a fortnight. Mr. Kinnear and Nancy are both away from home, and Grace is alone with McDermott. Jeremiah the peddler visits the house and Grace is delighted to see him. "In a new country," she tells Dr. Jordan, "friends become old friends very quickly." Grace invites Jeremiah in for some refreshments and the two begin chatting. Jeremiah says that he has heard Mr. Kinnear "has a hankering after the servant-girls" and that he hopes Grace "will not end up like Mary Whitney." Grace realizes that Jeremiah also knows that George Parkinson fathered Mary Whitney's child; she decides to share everything that has happened to her, including hearing Mary's ghostly voice, with Jeremiah. He again warns Grace to be leery of Mr. Kinnear, saying "once a sheep is killed, the dog will get a taste for it, and must kill another"—a metaphor which unsettles Grace.

Grace is made uneasy by the inherent violence of Jeremiah's dog and sheep metaphor. The fact that Jeremiah repeatedly cautions Grace about Mr. Kinnear suggests that Jeremiah sees Mr. Kinnear as having uncontrollable sexual urges, rather than as autonomous individual who can choose whether or not to seduce his servants. Coupled with McDermott's turtle analogy, it would seem that the men of Grace's society see the fellow members of their sex as being inherently and even excusably sexual. Though Jeremiah seems more aware of the violence of male sexuality (whereas McDermott is more focused on demeaning female sexuality), the fact that both these men seem to accept the fact that men can and will have sex with whomever they can shows how Grace's society privileges men and strongly disadvantages women.

Jeremiah tells Grace that he is considering giving up peddling his wares in favor of working at fairs as a mesmerist. He invites Grace to come away with him, saying, "I don't like the feel of things." Grace tells Dr. Jordan that she was tempted by the idea, as she found Jeremiah very handsome. However, when Jeremiah admits that he has no intention of marrying Grace, even were she to run away with him, Grace tells him, "I think I had better stay here."

Grace's refusal to run away with Jeremiah when she finds out he will not marry her is evidence of her sense of propriety. Though she does not acknowledge it, Jeremiah's aversion to marriage also seems to imply that he is more interested in winning Grace over as a sexual partner than as companion and equal. This serves to problematize Jeremiah as a character. This passage is also important because it is the first and only time that Grace expresses any attraction to a man. Even then, Grace's attraction is lukewarm and has more to do with the fact that she remembers she is "fated" to marry a man whose name starts with a J, and that being with Jeremiah would allow her to buy fancier clothes and travel.

McDermott angrily enters the room, causing Grace to wonder if he had been eavesdropping on her conversation with Jeremiah. Jeremiah offers to sell McDermott some shirts, in an effort to diffuse the tense situation; McDermott buys four shirts. Grace tells Dr. Jordan, "these were the very shirts that figured so largely at the trial," but that "the newspapers could not get the number of shirts right." Grace sees Jeremiah out, unperturbed by McDermott's displeasure, "as he [is] not [her] owner." She tells Dr. Jordan, "Just knowing I could go away if I wanted to made me feel safer, and happier as well."

Grace's insistence on setting the record straight with regard to the number of shirts McDermott bought shows how important she believes detail to be in telling a true story. This passage also seems to contain a hint that Grace is less bothered by Mr. Kinnear's advances toward her than she is by McDermott's, because Mr. Kinnear is her "owner," and thus has a certain "right" to her. Though Grace does not elaborate on this, it seems to be further proof that she views class status as integral to a person's identity and behavior.

CHAPTER 31

Several days after Jeremiah's visit, a doctor comes to the house. The day prior, while trying on a dress in front of her mirror Nancy had remarked that she was getting too plump," and this morning she had felt dizzy after breakfast. Grace suspects the doctor must have been summoned on Nancy's behalf. The doctor meets with Mr. Kinnear, but Grace spies Nancy speaking to the doctor in the driveway as he is leaving.

This moment again shows Grace's youth and inexperience. The fact that Nancy has gained weight and is seemingly experiencing morning sickness still does not tip Grace off to the fact that she's pregnant. Perhaps the fact that Grace is so flabbergasted by their cross-class relationship accounts for her inability to fathom a pregnancy.

Mr. Kinnear calls for Nancy, who is still outside with the doctor. Grace answers and says Nancy is lying down, because she thinks Nancy "might not want it known what she'd been doing." Mr. Kinnear asks for some coffee. When Grace goes to the kitchen to fetch it, she finds Nancy, who angrily insists that she will take Mr. Kinnear his coffee. She also tells Grace to scrub the kitchen floor, because she is "tired of living in a pigpen."

The fact that Grace covers for Nancy suggests that, despite their recent arguments, Grace still feels a sense of loyalty to Nancy. While harsh, Nancy's angry reaction to Grace is also partially understandable to the reader, who by this point has likely realized that Nancy is pregnant by Mr. Kinnear and is frustrated that he is seemingly paying so much attention to Grace.

The day has become hot and still, and Grace labors over the kitchen floor, scrubbing on her knees with her dress pulled between her legs and tucked into her apron. She hears someone enter and assumes it is McDermott; she tells him not to walk on her clean floor in his dirty boots. When she turns around, she finds Mr. Kinnear smirking at her, and she hurriedly tugs down her skirts, thinking "Why couldn't he have the decency to say who he was?" Nancy then comes into the kitchen and sees Grace conversing with Mr. Kinnear. She angrily orders Grace out of the kitchen and tells her to pin up her hair because she "look[s] like a common slut." Mr. Kinnear makes a quick exit. Alone with Nancy, Grace considers throwing something at her, but all of the sudden she realizes that Nancy is pregnant—or, "in trouble," as Grace thinks. Her realization makes Grace feel "as if [she's] been kicked in the stomach."

Though Grace remains deferential to Mr. Kinnear after she realizes he is spying on her, she also seems frustrated by him. This is a rare moment in which Grace critiques Mr. Kinnear's behavior, and it seems to suggest that Mr. Kinnear was far lewder toward Grace than she even realized—or, perhaps, than she is admitting to Dr. Jordan.

That night, Nancy and Mr. Kinnear dine together, while Grace eats in the kitchen with McDermott, wondering what Mr. Kinnear will do when he finds out about Nancy's pregnancy. She hopes Mr. Kinnear won't cast Nancy out, "a waif on the common highway and a prey to wandering scoundrels," but she also feels angry that Nancy might get off scot-free, when Mary Whitney died "for the same sin."

Grace's concern and disdain for Nancy seem to both be born of her memories of Mary Whitney. Grace doesn't want Nancy to be cast from the house and possibly assaulted on the highway, but her sense of justice tells her that Nancy deserves to die for her sin just as Mary Whitney did. It seems possible that Grace's vindictive notion of justice might be in part due to the fact that she actually believes it is wrong for Nancy to have gotten pregnant by Mr. Kinnear. However, the more likely interpretation is that Grace is still so devastated by and angry about Mary Whitney's death that she is subconsciously channeling that anger at Nancy. In moments like this one, it seems possible that Grace had enough motive to have killed Nancy—though it is important to note that, even if she did, she did not do it for love of Mr. Kinnear, as the newspapers claimed, but ultimately for love of Mary.

Grace tells McDermott she is going to bed, but instead she listens at the parlor door, wanting to overhear Mr. Kinnear reading *The Lady of the Lake* (a book Grace used to read with Mary Whitney) aloud to Nancy. Grace overhears the two flirting and when Mr. Kinnear asks Nancy what she thinks of Grace, Nancy replies that she has heard Grace talking to herself and wonders if she is "quite right." Grace continues to eavesdrop after Nancy and Mr. Kinnear have gone upstairs to bed, hearing Mr. Kinnear call Nancy "a dirty girl" and Nancy laughing.

Grace doesn't offer much commentary on the conversation she overhears, but she is very aware of the way that class differences color Nancy and Mr. Kinnear's relationship. Note also the mention of Grace talking to herself—possibly foreshadowing Grace's "possession" (or alibi of being possessed) by Mary Whitney.

Grace has a difficult time sleeping, because she is terrified of the thunderstorm that moves overhead. As she lies in bed she hears a voice near her ear say *It cannot be* and she is so terrified she passes out. She then has "a very strange dream," in which she is walking through the yard and feels two arms come around her from behind. She thinks it might be Jeremiah, or McDermott, or Mr. Kinnear, but then she realizes, it is "another man, someone I knew well and had long been familiar with, even as long ago as my childhood [...] nor was this the first time I'd found myself in this situation with him." Just then Grace hears a horse neighing, and recognizes it as the horse ridden by Death on the Day of Reckoning. She realizes that it is Death who has wrapped his arms around her, and as he kisses her with "his lipless **mouth**" she feels "horror" but also "a strange longing." Suddenly the sun rises, and Grace sees headless angels in robes washed with blood "sitting in silent judgment upon Mr. Kinnear's house, and on all within it." Grace then loses consciousness in the dream.

The first important aspect of this passage is the fact that Grace hears a voice that says, "It cannot be," which is the exact thought she herself had when she realized Nancy was pregnant. In retrospect, the reader will realize that (if Grace is to be believed) the voice speaking to Grace here is that of Mary Whitney, who is about to once again take possession of Grace's body. Grace's dream itself is hugely important. The violent imagery that she associates with God and divine justice seems to partially explain why she feels so powerless when the murder plot actually begins to unfold. More importantly, the fact that Grace realizes the man in her dream is someone she knew from her childhood implies that Grace was sexually abused by her father. Because she left her father's house when she was only twelve, this means that Grace was very young when her father sexually abused her. Though this information is never again referenced, it is important to note that Grace has likely suffered intense trauma at the hands of men since she was a young girl. Though this does not excuse the violence that Grace may have committed, it certainly contextualizes her fraught relationship to the questions of sex and power.

When Grace awakens she finds that her nightdress is wet and her feet are dirty. She worries that she "must have been walking around outside without knowing [she] was doing so," as she did after Mary Whitney's death. She goes outside to pump some water and finds that she forgot to bring the washing inside; the rain has blown it into the trees, making it look "as though our own **clothing** was sitting in judgment upon us," like the angels in Grace's dream. Grace wishes she could take Jeremiah up on his offer to run away, but she does not know how to contact him.

Once again, this is a passage that will take on more significance in hindsight, as it seems to be evidence that Grace has once again been possessed by Mary Whitney (though she, allegedly, is not aware of this at the time that she is narrating this story to Dr. Jordan). Grace's comment about the clothing in the trees is noteworthy because it symbolically represents Grace's fear that all of society is looking down on the "sin" taking place in the Kinnear household. In this way, Grace's vision-like dreams might be acting as a way for her to build her case that the Kinnear-Montgomery murders were somehow fated, or at least justifiable.

Grace notices that Dr. Jordan is furiously taking notes and she feels glad that she "can bring a little pleasure into a fellow-being's life." She thinks, "I wonder what he will make of all that."

This fleeting comment should raise a huge red flag, because it indicates that Grace may have been manipulating her story in order to satisfy Dr. Jordan's craving for the sensational, and/or to intentionally mislead him. Once again, the reader is reminded that Grace's narration cannot be taken at face value, since she has much to gain or lose from how she represents herself.

CHAPTER 32

It is summer, and Simon, having recently lived in Europe, is "dazed" by the sudden change in the weather. He is eating breakfast with Mrs. Humphrey; she has cooked because Dora is no longer at the house, but she does not want to carry breakfast up to Simon, "as it would be humiliating." The house is filthy, and Simon worries that his reputation, particularly in the eyes of the Reverend Verringer, might suffer. He has considered asking Grace for advice on how to hire a maid, but has decided against it because "he must retain his position of all-knowing authority in her eyes."

For the first time, the reader sees the toll that listening to Grace's story is taking on Simon. The fact that he is now living in squalor and beginning to panic about having a paper to present shows that Simon is becoming simultaneously more desperate and less aware of his reality. Not only is it ironic that Simon thinks Grace views him as all-knowing (in fact, she has long since thought of him as childlike and even slightly unstable), but it is also ironic that merely listening to Grace's life story has so affected Simon's mental stability. This makes the fact that Grace has survived for all of these years even more formidable and impressive.

Simon listens to Mrs. Humphrey discuss how grateful she is to him. He finds himself daydreaming about what Mrs. Humphrey would look like naked, but maintains that "in reality this woman does not attract him." Simon wonders if he is taken ill, and thinks he should probably follow his mother's advice and get married. He's annoyed by how solicitous Mrs. Humphrey is of him; he thinks there is "something cringing about her." Still, he continues with his sexual fantasies, imagining "her naked feet, shell-thin, exposed and vulnerable, tied together [...] like a parcel." Simon leaves abruptly and wanders by the lakeshore. He feels "insubstantial as a bladder, emptied of will."

Despite his sudden listlessness, Simon still has the mental energy to dream up sexual fantasies about Mrs. Humphrey in which she is humiliated and serves as little more than an object for his sexual pleasure. The fact that Simon is beginning to visibly unravel—while his mental habits remain largely unchanged—raises the question of what constitutes "madness" and whether insanity is actually visible to the naked eye.

Listening to Grace that day, Simon feels slightly better, as Grace "represents to him some goal or accomplishment." However, he finds that today Grace's voice nearly lulls him to sleep. He tries to focus—he knows that "at last they are approaching together the centre of Grace's narrative"—but he feels as though Grace is "drawing his energy out of him."

Simon's feeling that Grace is sapping his energy paints Grace as a kind of mystical figure. This description seems to comfort Simon, because it eliminates the need for him to acknowledge how depressed Grace's story has made him.

The chapter is interrupted by an excerpt of a letter from Simon's mother, in which Mrs. Jordan laments that she has not heard from her son recently. She also sends updates about the girl she wants Simon to marry.

Mrs. Jordan's letter reminds the reader that Simon and his mother are in a somewhat precarious financial situation due to the collapse of his late father's business. While Simon is wrapped up in Grace's story and sexual fantasies about his landlady, Mrs. Jordan remains focused on the practical realities of her son's future, suggesting that she is more rational and objective than her "all-knowing" physician son.

The chapter flashes ahead to the evening; Simon himself is feeling as though time has been making "odd lurches." He is dreading the next day, Tuesday, when he must address the Governor's wife and her friends. He tries to write a letter to his friend Edward Murchie, but realizes he has nothing to say because "he has discovered nothing."

Simon's apathy and disjointed sense of time suggest that he is falling out of touch with reality. The fact that he can't think of anything to say to his friend Edward is strange, since he has recently learned an incredible amount of information about Grace's life. The fact that he seems unable to process and parse this information suggests that he is less intellectually superior than he had fancied himself.

Simon suddenly awakens, shirtless in bed; there is a light in his doorway. He hears Mrs. Humphrey say she was alarmed by a noise "as if of someone attempting to break in through a **window**." Simon agrees to come downstairs to "check the locks and shutters"; he asks her to wait outside while he dresses. Simon thinks: "*This must stop* […] *This can't go on*. But nothing has been going on, and therefore nothing can stop."

Simon's dreamlike narration seems to depict Mrs. Humphrey as a kind of temptress, and his conviction that "this must stop" acts like a premonition. It is suddenly very difficult to know whether Simon can be trusted in his account of Mrs. Humphrey's reactions, or whether he might be hiding his true intentions from the reader. At this point in the novel, the balance between Grace's and Simon's claims to being reliable begins to reverse.

CHAPTER 33

Grace tells herself: "Soon the day will break […] A Saturday. The breaking day. The day the butcher comes." She wonders what she should tell Dr. Jordan about this day, the day the murders took place. She contemplates all the things she thinks she remembers, including Mr. Kinnear possibly telling her, "I pay good wages but I want good service in return" and "do not worry, I will not tell your mistress, it will be our secret." She feels sure that Nancy told her she would pay her her wages and then she would have to leave, but she can't remember if she cried behind the kitchen door afterwards, or if McDermott took her in his arms to comfort her. She says "surely" she did not say she wished Nancy dead—"or not out loud."

This lyrical passage approaches the style of poetry. It is difficult to tell whether Grace is awake or dreaming, and she herself is unable to identify which of her memories are real and which are fabricated. The dreamy quality of this passage raises the fundamental question: how much of experience is imagined or reconstructed in retrospect? Awash in Grace's memories—which might not have actually happened—the reader doesn't know what to believe. The question of truth is further complicated by the fact that Grace is not addressing Dr. Jordan in this chapter; it is thus unclear what her motives might be regarding how much she admits to the reader.

Grace tries to remember what Mr. Kinnear looked like so she can tell Dr. Jordan about it, but she realizes that "nobody wrote it down, not even in the newspapers […] because it is more important to be a murderess than the one murdered, you are more stared at then; and now he's gone." On the edge of sleep, Grace has another vision of the red cloth **flowers**. She dreams that she is in Mr. Kinnear's house, being chased, listening to a voice tell her "You must unlock the door, you must open the **window**, you must let me in." She then dreams that she is outside; she smells fresh meat even though she "told the butcher we wanted none." "On the palm of [her] hand," she dreams, "there is a disaster. I must have been born with it. I carry it with me wherever I go. When he touched me, the bad luck came off on him."

Grace's reflection on the importance of being the murderess rather than the murdered exposes the heartbreaking reality that the first time Grace was taken notice of for something she had done—rather than for an aspect of her physical body—is in the wake of the murders. Furthermore, her distress at the fact that nobody wrote down what Mr. Kinnear looked like highlights the role that physical writing—in contrast to oral storytelling, or private memory—can reliably act as a preservation of truth, even if it does not always do so. Her dream about the "disaster" on her palm is also significant because it suggests her feeling that she was somehow fated to live this life of scandal and pain.

Grace awakens. She realizes, with a sense of horror, that today she must finish narrating her story. She describes the feeling of telling a story as "a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it."

Grace's comparison of storytelling to a natural disaster emphasizes the dark ability of stories to overpower their narrators, and morph into something not of the narrator's making. While this could be interpreted as an attempt on Grace's part to account for any mistakes or untruths that may be discovered in the story she is telling Dr. Jordan, it seems more likely that this quotation is a genuine reflection of the powerlessness that Grace feels as a result of having to tell her story, having lived her whole life in a society that has consistently told her she had nothing of importance to say.

CHAPTER 34

Simon has made it through his talk for the Governor's wife's Tuesday circle, and feels that "his indisposition appears to have passed." His speech focused on the evolving medical consensus on the origin of mental illness, and he is now discussing the talk over tea with Dr. DuPont. DuPont hints that he would like to try hypnotizing Grace, which annoys Simon—"Grace is his territory; he must repel poachers," he thinks. DuPont insists that Mrs. Quennell and the committee working to secure Grace's pardon are advocating for a hypnosis session, which makes Simon worry that the committee is becoming impatient with him.

For the first time, Simon explicitly thinks of Grace as less than human. His desire to "repel poachers" goes beyond his prior similes likening Grace to foodstuffs; here, he is literally framing Grace as his property. Though he might claim he is only thinking ironically, it seems clear at this point that Simon is a misogynist. This passage is also important because it indicates the pressure Simon is facing to get "results" from his work with Grace; this pressure from the committee seems likely to itself limit Simon's ability to conceive of (in)sanity in nuanced terms.

For the first and only time in the novel, the point of view switches in the middle of a chapter, with the perspective shifting to Grace. Because Dr. Jordan is speaking at the Tuesday circle, Grace has not seen him today. The Governor's wife has asked Grace to help prepare for the circle's meeting, which means Grace takes her meal in the kitchen "just like a real servant," which pleases her. Dora has been helping with the laundry at the Governor's house and she informs Grace that "the young doctor" who works at her old place of employment has hired her back. Dora says this doctor is strange; he has dug up half of the yard trying to start a garden, and Dora says that his profession gives him "the air of a poisoner." Grace is shocked to find that Dora is talking about Dr. Jordan, and she inquires about the lady of the house. Dora replies that "if ever she saw a determination to get a man's trousers off him, it was there in the eyes of Mrs. Humphrey." Grace is put off by Dora's taste for gossip, so she says no more.

For the first time in the novel, the reader is presented with an "outside" perspective of Dr. Jordan, one that does not come from Grace or from Dr. Jordan's own chapters. Dora's description of Dr. Jordan makes him seem neurotic and untrustworthy; but at the same time, her account corroborates Dr. Jordan's feeling that Mrs. Humphrey would like to seduce him. Though Grace resolutely ignores Dora's description, the reader is left to wonder which Dr. Jordan is the "real" one. This is powerful, because the novel began with the question of which Grace was real. This inversion shows that sanity is not an objective quality, and that society's conception of sanity is strongly gendered.

When Grace serves the refreshments following Dr. Jordan's talk, she is so shocked to see Jeremiah the peddler in the room that she nearly drops the plate she is carrying. The Governor's wife introduces Jeremiah to Grace as Dr. Jerome DuPont. DuPont asks if Grace will consent to being hypnotized; he squeezes Grace's chin and moves his eyes up and down, "to signal to [her] that [she] should say yes." Grace agrees. Though she is nervous about being put into a trance, she is pleased by the idea that she and Jeremiah have "made a pact" under the noses of the others, and she thinks that Dr. Jordan "look[s] a poor fish beside Jeremiah, like a man at a fair who's had his pocket picked, but does not yet know it."

In terms of the plot, the revelation that Dr. DuPont is actually Jeremiah the peddler is a high point of the novel. On a more nuanced level, this moment is important because Grace's extreme satisfaction at having outwitted Dr. Jordan, in collaboration with Jeremiah, raises the possibility that she and Jeremiah are somehow in cahoots. This has huge implications for the later scene in the novel in which Grace is hypnotized.

CHAPTER 35

Simon meets with Grace to continue hearing her narration; her story has "come at last to the murders." Simon tells Grace that he is "a doctor, not a judge," and only wants to hear what Grace can remember of that day. Simon "plunges in," asking Grace to confirm that Mr. Kinnear left for town on a Thursday. Grace assents, saying that when Mr. Kinnear left he told her, "Here's your favorite beau, Grace, come and kiss him goodbye." Simon asks if Mr. Kinnear was referring to McDermott, and Grace icily corrects him, saying Mr. Kinnear was referring to Charley Horse. Simon then asks Grace several questions about whether Mr. Kinnear ever made sexual advances to her; Grace is offended and says, "You are just like them at the Asylum, and the prison chaplains, and Dr. Bannerling and his filthy ideas!" Simon backs off, and instead asks Grace to explain what happened after Mr. Kinnear left that Thursday.

Grace takes offense at the fact that Simon is so interested in knowing the details of her relationship to Mr. Kinnear. On the one hand, it seems completely reasonable that Grace would be offended by Simon's line of questioning; her whole life, she has been treated by men as a sexual object, and she has already been subject to years of speculation regarding her relationship with McDermott. On the other hand, because this chapter is narrated in close third-person to Simon, it is difficult to know exactly why Grace is so repulsed by the suggestion that she had a sexual relationship with Mr. Kinnear. Though the reader might be just as tempted as Simon to know the answers to his questions, Grace's passionate declaration that the men who are so interested in her are actually interested in their own sexual fantasies is nevertheless deserving of the reader's compassion.

Grace says that Nancy informed both her and McDermott that they were to leave in two days' time; she then left to go to a friend's house. Grace was distraught and took a few glasses of whiskey with McDermott, during which time he told her that he intended to "kill Nancy with the axe, and strangle her as well, and shoot Mr. Kinnear when he came back." He insisted that Grace help him, and Grace tells Simon, "If I were not so upset [about being let go] I would have laughed at him, but I did not." She says she felt "afraid of him; and […] had a strong feeling as if it was fated, and it couldn't be avoided, no matter what [she] did." When Simon asks why Grace did not warn Nancy, she replies that McDermott could have easily denied her allegations by calling her "a silly hysterical girl"; she also says she was afraid that McDermott might kill her if she warned Nancy.

This passage is important because the reasons Grace gives for silently going along with McDermott's plan and not warning Nancy of it are completely understandable given what the reader knows about Grace's society. It seems entirely possible to think that McDermott could convince Nancy that Grace was lying and "hysterical," and that McDermott might retaliate against Grace with violence. This passage thus highlights how difficult it is to judge Grace's story, because of the complicated societal forces that confined her choices.

Grace says that Nancy returned from her friend's house and dined with Grace and McDermott. Nancy and Grace then went to bed together, with Grace making sure to lock the door; when questioned by Simon, Grace explains, "[McDermott] wanted to kill Nancy while asleep. I said he should not do that, as he might hit me by mistake, but it was hard to convince him. He said he didn't want her looking at him when he did it." The next day, Friday, Grace claims "began right as rain." Jamie Walsh came over to play the flute, and Nancy and Grace sang and drank whisky together, though McDermott remained in a "dark mood."

The most striking aspect of this passage is the fact that, according to Grace, McDermott wanted to kill Nancy while she was sleeping because that way he would not have to worry about "her looking at him" while he murdered her. This suggests that McDermott might feel some level of shame about killing someone—yet, at the same time, the fact that he feels no qualms about killing Nancy while she is unconscious controverts this idea. Regardless, there is a powerfully sexual undertone to McDermott's desire not *to have Nancy look at him—as if he wants the murder to be dispassionate and divorced of intimacy.*

That night, at Nancy's suggestion, Grace and Nancy went to bed in Mr. Kinnear's room. According to Grace, Nancy insisted that "Mr. Kinnear would not find it out, as it was us who made up the beds, not him; and even if he did discover it, he would not care, but would no doubt like the idea of two serving-maids in his bed at once." Grace says that she "did warn Nancy, after all"; while Nancy was combing her hair, Grace told her, "McDermott wants to kill you," but Nancy brushed it off as an empty threat. Grace tells Simon, "So then I knew there was nothing I could do, to save her."

This passage is striking mostly because of what it says about Mr. Kinnear. Nancy's claim that he would be aroused by the idea of her sleeping in his bed with Grace suggests that Mr. Kinnear is sexually excited by the idea of exerting sexual power over two women whom he already holds economic and social power over. Mr. Kinnear's fantasy, articulated by Nancy, also fetishes lesbian relationships, which, if the reader interprets Grace as being a lesbian, could be seen as further evidence for Grace disliking Nancy. This passage is also important because it is difficult to know whether Grace is telling the truth in saying she warned Nancy of McDermott's plot; it is left to the reader to determine whether Nancy brushing off such a warning seems plausible.

That night Grace had two dreams. In the first dream she was visited by Mary Whitney, who appeared at Mr. Kinnear's bedside holding a firefly in a jar. The firefly escaped, and Grace realized it was Mary's soul "trying to find its way out but the **window** was shut." Grace awoke in tears. When she fell back asleep, she had a second dream, about "a place [she] had never been before, with high walls all around." She relates the dream to Simon—it is the same passage that opened the novel, with Grace walking in the prison yard, seeing the red cloth **flowers** and Nancy bleeding and strangled. The dream ends the same way: with Grace in a cellar, a man blocking the stairs, and Grace knowing she "[will] never get out."

Grace's second dream is the same one with which the novel opened. The fact that Grace claims to have dreamed about Nancy's murder and her own imprisonment before either of these events occurred imbues her with a kind of mystical power—if, that is, the reader believes that Grace actually dreamed this the night before Nancy was killed. Grace's first dream, if the reader accepts that Mary Whitney has actually been possessing Grace's body, is an indication that this possession is about to happen again. Regardless, the fact that Grace still feels guilty about Mary's death speaks to how deeply Grace loved Mary, and how hard she is on herself.

Surprised, Simon asks Grace to confirm that she had this dream before the murders took place. Grace assents, adding that this is why she was "put away" in the Asylum—"because of the bad dreams." Simon asks, "Only the dreams?" and Grace replies, "They said they were not dreams at all, Sir. They said I was awake. But I do not wish to say any more about it."

Grace's comment that she was actually awake is mysterious. It is not clear what Grace did when she had these recurring bad dreams while in prison and at the asylum. Though much of this passage is inexplicable, the fact that Grace is so tortured by not only the dreams themselves but also the way she has been treated because *of the dreams underscores the fact that her society is not compassionate in its treatment of people, particularly women, whom it deems "insane."*

CHAPTER 36

Grace tells Simon that she woke up at dawn that Saturday to the sound of a rooster crowing. She says that she thought, "Soon you will be a carcass"; she tells Simon that she was thinking about both the rooster and Nancy. Though she admits this sounds like an "odd" thought, she "wish[es] to relate everything that happened to [her], and those were the thoughts [she] had." As she was getting dressed, Grace noticed that her face in the mirror looked "rounder and whiter, with two great startled staring eyes"; she tells Simon, "I didn't wish to look at it." She went into the kitchen, opened the **windows**, and cleared the dinner plates from the previous night, taking them into the scullery. When she returned to the kitchen, she found it covered in silver light; she tells Simon, "I knew it was because God had come into the house and this was the silver that covered Heaven."

Many aspects of this passage are strange and difficult to interpret. The detached, dispassionate way Grace claims to have thought about Nancy on the day of her murder seems to work against Grace regarding the question of her guilt. The fact that she expresses these strange thoughts about Nancy is complicated by Grace's claim that she is committed to telling the whole truth. Perhaps she has only shared her thoughts about Nancy in order to be able to share this *statement of her commitment of truth, as a way to make herself seem credible. As Grace approaches her narration of the actual murders, it becomes more and more difficult to interpret her story and her motives. This passage is also striking because of the appearance of God. Grace does not explicitly state why she thinks God visited the Kinnear household, but her depiction of Him as a passive, impartial light seems consistent with her deep sense of fate and predestination.*

Grace left the kitchen again, this time to milk the cow. When she returned she found McDermott. She asked if he planned to kill Nancy that morning, and he assented. Grace said, "Surely you cannot bring yourself to do such a wicked thing," which McDermott interpreted as a deliberate insult to his manhood. Exasperated, Grace replied that McDermott should not kill Nancy in the room because it would "make the floor all bloody." Grace tells Simon that "it was a foolish thing to say," but that she couldn't help but think of the carpet in Nancy's room, as it was her job to clean it. She says, "I'd never tried to get blood out of a carpet but I'd got it out of other things, and it is not a task to be sneezed at."

Grace's statement about McDermott bloodying the floor by killing Nancy is darkly humorous in its irony and almost stubborn practicality. At the same time, it is deeply disturbing. Grace herself seems baffled by the fact that this was her reaction to McDermott's assertion that he would kill Nancy. Regardless of what else Grace's statement says about her (im)morality or her relationship to Nancy, it highlights the essential role that Grace's status as a servant plays in the way she interprets her world.

McDermott left the kitchen and Grace heard him pick up the axe. She says she could not think what to do, so she went out to the garden to pick chives for the breakfast Nancy had ordered. She tried to pray, but says she could feel God's "cold breath" and could "hear the beating of his dark wings, inside [her] heart." She says she then heard "a dull sound" from the house, and that she "can remember no more for a time."

While in the garden, Grace experiences the conviction that God is still in the Kinnear house—not only where she saw him in the kitchen this morning but also in Nancy, McDermott, and "in the axe too." In this way, Grace is framing her sense of powerlessness on the day of the murder in religious terms, as if to act in defense of Nancy might somehow have controverted the will of God. This is an odd claim, and Grace does little to explain it. It is implied that the "dull sound" Grace hears is McDermott striking Nancy with the axe, but Grace never confirms this, and, as always, it is difficult to determine whether her claim that she can't remember the succeeding events is trustworthy.

Simon presses Grace about the many details listed in her confession—such as her saying she witnessed McDermott drag Nancy by her hair. Distressed, Grace says that this is what her lawyer, Mr. MacKenzie, told her to say in order "to save [her] own life." She admits that the handkerchief used to strangle Nancy was hers, but says she does not remember giving it to McDermott. Simon presses further, asking Grace if she recalls "wanting to steal the gold earrings off [Nancy's] corpse," as McDermott said she did. Grace says, "I won't say I didn't think of it later, when we were packing up; but having a thought is not the same as doing it. If we were all on trial for our thoughts, we would all be hanged."

The fact that the story Grace is now telling matches neither her own confession nor McDermott's highlights the fact that the "truth," which is supposedly objective, is often based entirely on people's memories, which are inherently subjective. Grace's point about people being hanged for their thoughts is important because it emphasizes the fact that there is an aspect of justice that is fundamentally arbitrary—everyone has thought something that makes them deserved to be hanged, Grace says, which means that there is inherently a sort of randomness in who actually does *get hanged. It is up to the reader to decide whether Grace's account of justice—which conveniently allows her to abdicate responsibility for her actions—is an acceptable one.*

Simon asks Grace what the next thing she can remember is. Grace says she found herself standing by the **flower**beds at the front of the house. She says, "I was thinking, I must open the **window**; but that was foolish, as I was already outside." Mr. Kinnear arrived home then and went inside. McDermott cornered Grace and extracted a promise from her that she would help him kill Mr. Kinnear; "I did say I would"; Grace tells Simon, "for if not, I could see by his eyes he would have killed me as well."

It is important to note that Grace claims she cannot remember the details of Nancy's murder, yet she doesn't hesitate to share her memory of Mr. Kinnear's murder. This could be interpreted as evidence that Grace was complicit in Nancy's murder in a way she does not want to admit. (Though if the reader accepts the idea that Grace has been possessed by Mary Whitney, Grace's lack of memory at this point makes sense.)

Grace went into the kitchen to carry on her daily duties, and when Mr. Kinnear came in to ask after Nancy, Grace told him "she had gone to town in the stagecoach." Mr. Kinnear was confused but not concerned, and he asked Grace to prepare his breakfast. She did, and when she returned to the kitchen after delivering Mr. Kinnear's food, she found McDermott, who said he would kill Mr. Kinnear now. Grace asked him to "wait till it is dark," but McDermott was compelled to wait regardless, Grace says, as Mr. Kinnear took a nap after eating and "even [McDermott] was not up to the shooting of a sleeping man." Grace says McDermott stuck "as close as glue" to her all day, and though he was "cursing a good deal," she "did not object to it, being afraid."

Again, Grace's reasoning for why she did not stand up to McDermott seem reasonable, so it is difficult to determine whether she is telling the truth in insisting that she did not of her own will want Mr. Kinnear dead. The most important part of this passage is the fact that McDermott was, according to Grace, not immoral enough to have shot a sleeping man. This stands in startling contrast to the fact that McDermott actively wanted *to kill Nancy while she was sleeping. This contrast suggests that because she is a woman, McDermott seems to think Nancy does not deserve the dignity that would be afforded her if he challenged her while she was conscious.*


At seven in the evening, Mr. Kinnear came downstairs for dinner and was very worried about Nancy. McDermott asked Grace to call Mr. Kinnear into the kitchen so he could "shoot him on the stone floor," but Grace refused and left the house to do some washing, wanting "nothing to do with it." From across the courtyard she heard the sound of a gun. She ran to back to the kitchen and "saw Mr. Kinnear lying dead on the floor, and McDermott standing over him." McDermott screamed at Grace to open the trapdoor, which she eventually did; McDermott threw Mr. Kinnear's body down the stairs. Grace was so terrified that she ran out the front door of the house. McDermott ran after her and fired at her with the gun, causing Grace to faint. Grace says that is "all [she] can remember" until "much later in the evening."

Grace's amnesia again seems convenient, as she has managed to avoid accounting for the fact that Nancy's body was found strangled by her handkerchief. However, as the reader later learns, evidence found at the scene of the murders seems to confirm Grace's claim that she was shot at by McDermott. Again and again, the reader's trust in Grace is challenged by the complexities of her story and her motives.

Simon tells Grace that, according to Jamie Walsh's testimony, Grace was standing by the pump at the yard at eight o'clock in the evening, looking "well, and in good spirits" and "better dressed than usual," implying that Grace was wearing Nancy's stockings. Grace dejectedly insists that the stockings were her own, and that "there is nothing [she] can do about what other people say." Simon "feels a tender pity" for Grace and tells her they can continue the story tomorrow. Grace agrees and says: "It would be a great relief to me, to know the whole truth at last."

Grace's despairing statement that she can't change what people say about her speaks to the powerful way in which her story has been appropriated by other people, such that her actual version of events is of less value than popular belief about the murders. Her claim that she, like Dr. Jordan, only wants to know the truth about the murders is yet another example of a complex statement that makes Grace an opaque character; it is difficult to tell if she is being genuine, or if she is, like some people have described her, a talented actress. The fact that the reader has seen how grossly prejudiced and hypocritical people like Bannerling have been in their assessment of Grace might make it difficult to believe that Grace could have fabricated her amnesia, yet Atwood never explicitly closes down this possibility.


CHAPTER 37

Simon walks home, feeling "a curious tension" in his arms, "as though he's been pulling hard on a heavy rope." He's disappointed that he hasn't gained access to Grace's "missing memory." He wonders, "How much of her story can he allow himself to believe? Does he need a grain of salt, or two, or three?" He wonders if he is using the right methods with Grace, and he strongly considers encouraging—even attending—Dr. DuPont's hypnosis session with Grace.

It's important to note that Simon is essentially claiming ownership of the hard work of telling Grace's story, by making the act of his listening seem equally strenuous. The fact that he is willing to consider allowing DuPont to hypnotize Grace is evidence of his desire to reach a concrete conclusion about Grace and her story; unlike Grace, Simon is unwilling and perhaps even unable to allow for the existence of multiple and conflicting meanings.

Simon arrives home, and Dora greets him coldly at the door. Mrs. Humphrey invites Simon to dine with her, but he declines, as he has "half accepted" an invitation to go rowing on the lake with Miss Lydia. Upstairs, Simon realizes that Mrs. Humphrey has been stealing laudanum from him, and he feels angry at having "been taken." That night, Simon goes on the rowing trip and considers proposing to Lydia to appease his mother. But, he thinks, he's "not that lazy, or weary; not yet."

Simon's sense of anger at having been robbed by Mrs. Humphrey reflects his surprise at the fact that she is capable of agency, since he has consistently conceived of her as being helpless and passive. The fact that he frames Mrs. Humphrey's theft in vaguely sexual terms (he's been "taken" by her) suggests that while he is annoyed by her assertion of power over him, he still thinks of her with a degree of sexual desire.

CHAPTER 38

Grace continues with her story; it is not in quotation marks, so it is as if Grace is speaking directly to the reader. Grace says that McDermott later told her that, after he had fired upon her, he revived her with water and the two ate dinner together and toasted "the success of [their] venture." Grace maintains that she "could not have acted so heartlessly" and calls McDermott "a great liar."

Grace directly contradicts McDermott's description of the night of the murders, and the reader is likely to believe Grace over McDermott, given that Grace has never felt a true sense of companionship or teamwork with McDermott. However, the very fact that the reader is biased in favor of Grace could be nothing more than evidence of Grace's power as a storyteller.

Grace recalls waking up on her bed with the door open and "the light […] already fading." She says McDermott must have carried her upstairs because "if [she'd] walked in by [herself] [she] would have locked" the door. Her head aches and she falls asleep, awakening with the feeling that someone is in the room. McDermott is standing over Grace, and she begins to panic, thinking he might try to strangle her. Instead, he asks how she is feeling and sits down on the bed. He then tells Grace that she "had promised him [her]self in exchange for the killing of Nancy." In narrating, Grace insists that she does not remember making such a promise and that she was convinced McDermott was "a madman," twisting her words to use against her. McDermott was drunk at the time he came into her room, and Grace says she realized that having sex with him "was the only way to humour him." She resolved to delay sleeping with him as long as possible, as she was convinced that "once [she'd] given in to him, he would consider [her] a whore" and would kill her.

Grace's description of McDermott reveals him to be not only a misogynist, but also a sexual predator. Especially given the modern-day conversations about consent and sexual assault, it might be difficult for the reader to feel ethically comfortable dismissing Grace's claims here out of hand. It seems not only plausible but indeed likely that Grace is telling the truth here, and that rather than seeing McDermott as a rapist, the public may have been more scandalized by and thus more interested in conceiving of Grace as McDermott did—as a manipulative flirt, and even an evil temptress.

After Grace suggests that they go to "some other bed," as her bed is very narrow, McDermott carries her to Mr. Kinnear's room. Grace almost faints from fright when McDermott begins undressing her, but she recalls that "if [she] fainted [she] was as good as dead, with him in the state he was in." She begins to sob, saying she can't bear to have sex in a "dead man's bed," and McDermott loses his erection. He becomes angry and drags Grace down the hall, saying, "If you don't like that bed [...] I shall do it in Nancy's, for you are as great a slut as she was."

Grace's determination to save herself from rape is both formidable and heartrending. McDermott's insistence that Grace is "as a great a slut as Nancy" shows that he resorts to smearing women's reputations when they are more powerful than he (Nancy) or do not sexually capitulate to him (Grace). It is difficult to see McDermott as anything other than a villain, but if the contrasting narratives of Grace and Dr. Jordan have proved anything, it is that everything is relative. It seems unlikely, but perhaps McDermott might seem a more sympathetic character if the reader were to hear him narrate his own story.

In Nancy's room, Grace sees that the bed is "all spattered with dark blood,"; a book lying in the bed is also covered in blood. McDermott says the book is something Mr. Kinnear was reading when he was shot. McDermott threw the book into Nancy's bed "because Kinnear's blood was on Nancy's head, for if she had not been such a bloody great whore and shrew, all would have been different, and Mr. Kinnear needn't have died."

Again, McDermott demonstrates his misogyny by blaming Nancy for Mr. Kinnear's murder. This shows how society codes female premarital sex as deviant, but deems male premarital sex normal. It seems to not even occur to McDermott to blame Nancy for her own murder—rather, it is as if McDermott seems not to care if Nancy is alive or dead.

Discussing the bloody book causes McDermott to become more serious, and Grace seizes the opportunity to distract him from raping her by suggesting that they pack their things and leave. McDermott agrees and, Grace says, "in the end we ransacked the house." Grace takes Nancy's **clothes**, but leaves the dress Nancy had been sewing for herself. "I'd heard the dead would come back to complete what they had left undone," she says, "and I didn't want her missing it, and following after me. For by this time I was almost certain she was dead."

Grace's love of clothes yet again evokes her almost unwavering belief in the class hierarchy. The most notable part of this passage, however, is when Grace states that it was only at this point that she began to feel "almost certain" Nancy was dead. It is difficult to parse whether Grace is saying this to cover for the fact that she directly contributed to killing Nancy by strangling her, or whether she feels enough confusion about the situation and compassion toward Nancy that she wants to believe she's still alive. Regardless, this moment seems to highlight that it is possible to deceive oneself through storytelling in much the same way that it's possible to deceive others.

Before leaving, Grace tidies the house, even emptying Nancy's chamber pot, as she feels that leaving it full would be "somehow disrespectful." She also puts on one of Nancy's dresses and a bonnet, and even dabs rose water behind her ears, describing the smell as "a comfort of sorts." While she is burning her own **clothes**, McDermott comes into the kitchen and says he is ready to leave. When Grace complains that she cannot find her blue **flowered** handkerchief, McDermott replies that it is "downstairs in the cellar, keeping the sun off Nancy's neck; as [Grace] ought to remember, seeing as how [she herself] had pulled it tight and tied the knot." Narrating, Grace says that she was shocked, but that "as it is dangerous to contradict mad people," she told McDermott that she had merely forgotten.

Grace turns the charge that has so often been levied against her—madness—against McDermott in order to depict him as the villain. This shows Grace's perceptiveness about the power of insanity as a buzzword in her society. This passage is also striking because Grace is so meticulous in her actions in the wake of the double murders, being sure to dress herself as a lady and to fulfill her duty to Nancy—as a servant? a friend? it's difficult to tell—by emptying her chamber pot. Passages like this one make it seem possible that it will never fully be within the reader's power to comprehend all of Grace's motivations and actions.

Grace and McDermott leave the house at eleven that night. McDermott starts talking about hiring servants of their own once he and Grace safely reach the States, but Grace keeps mum because she "[does] not intend to stay with him any more than a minute" after the two reach America. She recalls looking into the sky and seeing "only emptiness." "This was more frightening than anything I could think of," Grace recalls, "and I prayed silently to God to forgive my sins; but what if there was no God to forgive me?" Shortly thereafter, the sky fills up with stars.

Grace again wrestles with her religious beliefs. It is important to remember that Grace was barely sixteen at the time of the murders. Her sense of panic and her desperate attempt to reconcile her conflicting beliefs in a benevolent God and in the almost amoral concept of fate seems entirely understandable given her youth and the trauma she has just experienced.

Grace begins to doze off; the last thing she remembers before falling asleep is "the feel of [McDermott] settling the shawl tenderly around [her] shoulders." Grace wakes up as McDermott slams her to the ground and climbs on top of her, covering her **mouth** as she begins to scream. Grace goes quiet and as soon as McDermott removes his hand she orders him to get off of her. McDermott claims that Grace was the one who asked him to stop the wagon so she could urinate; when she climbed down, he says, she instead spread out her shawl and "invited him to join [her] on it like the hot bitch [she] was." Grace says, "I knew I had done no such thing, having been sound asleep, and I said so."

This is a crucial moment. The fact that Grace contradicts McDermott, even though he might respond by raping or killing her, shows how important her sense of her own sexual propriety is to her. She refuses to let McDermott misrepresent her in this regard. Regardless of her other more ambiguous characteristics, it is difficult not to admire Grace's courage and conviction in this moment.

McDermott becomes angry and holds Grace down by her hair, preparing to rape her. She bites him on the ear and he becomes so angry she thinks that "he might kill [her] there and then." Instead, he calms down and helps Grace up, saying he will wait until they are married and that "he had just been testing [her]." He also comments that Grace "certainly [has] good strong teeth." She says that this comment surprised her, but she "said nothing, as [she] was still all alone with him on an empty road, with many miles to go."

McDermott's bizarre comment about Grace's teeth seems to testify to the animalistic side of Grace that revealed itself in Grace's description of Mary Whitney's scent. Furthermore, Grace's self-defensive violence against him seems to excitd McDermott, which underscores yet again the way that men living in a patriarchal society are prone to linking sexual pleasure and the violent conquest of women.

CHAPTER 39

Grace and McDermott arrive in Toronto around five in the morning, and McDermott insists on breakfasting at the City Hotel, though this causes Grace to "[shiver] with apprehension, because of all the attention he was calling to himself." Grace and McDermott then have to wait for the eight o'clock ferry across Lake Ontario to the States. As the sun comes up, Grace is horrified to realize that McDermott is wearing Mr. Kinnear's boots. She asks him about it and he says that he is also wearing one of Mr. Kinnear's shirts; he removed the bloody shirt from Mr. Kinnear's body, as well, and replaced it with his own. This upsets Grace because she realizes that the shirt now on Mr. Kinnear's body was one of the four that McDermott purchased from Jeremiah the peddler; she is concerned that Jeremiah will be blamed for participating in Kinnear's murder.

This passage is, on some level, humorously and darkly ironic, as McDermott's brash and bungling actions contrast with Grace's natural subtlety—making it clear that Grace could have been the much more successful villain, had she chosen to be. This passage is also important because of Grace's horrified reaction to the fact that McDermott is wearing Mr. Kinnear's clothes. Grace seems unable to admit that her actions are comparable; something about the fact that McDermott removed Mr. Kinnear's bloody shirt (even though this is not *the shirt McDermott is now wearing) seems to strike Grace as deeply improper. Perhaps this passage reveals a blind spot in Grace's personality; in the same way that Dr. Jordan would be unlikely to think of himself as a misogynist, Grace seems unable to see her own actions as unfeeling, even when they are.*

Grace convinces McDermott to change his **clothes** and she does the same. The moment he leaves to shave, Grace says, "was the moment [she] could have run for help." However, she says she did not wish to betray McDermott: "There is something despicable about betrayal; and I'd felt his heart beating next to mine, and however undesired, still it was a human heart; and I did not wish to have any part in stilling it forever, unless I should be forced to."

Grace's feeling of loyalty toward McDermott seems to exceed their shared class status and extend to their shared identity as human beings. On the surface, this seems to be more evidence of Grace's deep compassion, particularly for people who are suffering or isolated. Yet it is difficult to reconcile Grace's sense of compassion for McDermott with the fact that she may have been an accomplice to murder, if not a murderer herself. Grace's philosophy on life is deeply complicated, containing many contradictions.

Grace and McDermott board the ferry with Charley Horse, whom they have taken with them in their escape. Grace is posing as Mary Whitney and McDermott as her brother, David. On the ferry, some young boys begin to flirt with Grace and she—"attempting to allay suspicion"—"return[s] their sallies with good humour, though it told against [her] at the trial." As the ferry makes its way toward Lewiston, New York, Grace has a realization that a **quilt** pattern she is familiar with but has always found confusing, called Lady of the Lake, is actually "a pinwheel design, which must have stood for the paddle going around." "I thought," she said, "that things did [...] have a design to them, if you only pondered them long enough. And perhaps it might be with recent events, which at the moment seemed [...] so entirely senseless." She calls this realization a lesson in faith.

Grace's realization about the Lady of the Lake quilt pattern shows how desperately people want to believe in a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. This seems to account for the power of storytelling: it satisfies some deep human need for a conclusion. This passage is also important due to the detail of Grace flirting with the boys on the boat. This detail reflects Grace's tolerance of the man's harassment in her carriage ride to Richmond Hill; both instances demonstrate the way that the reason women cater to men's sense of ownership over them is often because they are merely trying to ensure their own survival.

The ferry lands in New York State. While on the boat, McDermott had attempted to sell Charley Horse and the wagon; as a result, "the Customs Officer in Lewiston put[s] a duty" on these two items. Grace and McDermott do not have the money to pay this duty, so they are forced to stay the night in Lewiston, with McDermott deciding that he will sell some of their other possessions the following day in order to pay off the money owed. The two spend the night at an inn, where McDermott tries to force his way into Grace's room. When Grace denies him entry, McDermott calls her "a slut and a whore" and she tells him "he should think of some new words to use, because [she is] heartily tired of those." Grace makes up her mind that night to wake up early and sneak away, as she is convinced that McDermott will end up murdering her after he forces her to marry him. As she is falling asleep she takes comfort in the thought that "in a hundred years [she] would be dead and at peace, and in [her] grave."

Grace's quip that McDermott should think up some insults that don't involve her sex drive epitomizes her unique brand of humor and self-assurance. At the same time, it also underscores the fact that McDermott is accusing Grace of having a voracious sexual appetite only because her sexual preferences do not happen to encompass him. This further highlights the idea that men in Grace's society, regardless of their class status, feel entitled to women's bodies. This passage is also noteworthy because of the melancholy comfort Grace takes in death; she thinks of it as being "at peace." Not only does this reflection seem to arise from Grace's sense of fatalism, but it also emphasizes her depression and sense of purposelessness.

CHAPTER 40

Grace recalls the dream she had on the night she spent at the Lewiston inn. She dreamt that she was walking along the driveway leading to Mr. Kinnear's house, knowing that Mary Whitney was waiting there to welcome her. In the dream, the house felt like Grace's "real home," but as she drew near "the house went dark" and she felt a hand "slipped into [hers]." "And then," Grace says, "there was a knocking at the door."

Grace's dream on the eve of her arrest once again emphasizes the importance of her bond with Mary Whitney—arguably the only source of lasting happiness in Grace's life. Grace's longing for a "real home" suggests that Jeremiah the peddler may have been right in characterizing Grace as a kind of wanderer.

CHAPTER 41

One of the epigraphs that opens this section of the book is a quotation from Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1844 short story "Rapaccini's Daughter." The epigraph contains the line, "Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions."

This epigraph speaks to the novel's argument that women should not be defined according to a binary of good and evil, or purity and impurity. In light of Hawthorne's statement, it would seem that all characters in Alias Grace, *regardless of their gender, have something of the "infernal" in them, because people naturally experience a mixture of both dark and bright emotions. The fact that this mixture is also "illuminating" might help to explain why Grace, in particular, is such a fascinating character.*

This chapter consists of a letter from Mrs. Jordan to Simon. She writes that she is anxious to see her son again, and that she is worried about the "calamitous War looming ever nearer in the distance."

Mrs. Jordan's letter provides a reminder of the historical context of the novel; though Canada was at peace, the United States was on the verge of a Civil War.

CHAPTER 42

Simon is dreaming of the servants' corridor in his childhood home. He opens a door, seeking the maid with whom he had his first kiss, but finds that he is at the hospital in London where he completed his medical training. He sees a dead woman covered in a sheet, but when he lifts it he finds that there are more and more layers, including a black veil and a petticoat. He hears running water and "a quick indrawn breath" and then feels a hand touching his shoulder.

Simon's dream seems to reflect his frustration at the complexity of Grace's story. However, the details of the indrawn breath he hears and the hand he feels in his also implies that Simon might find something exciting about the mystery of Grace.

Simon awakens, but he "knows he must still be asleep, because Grace Marks is bending over him in the close darkness, her loosened hair brushing his face." He flips Grace over and begins having sex with her, "his spine jerk[ing] him like a hooked fish." After he ejaculates, he realizes "he's not dreaming; or not dreaming the woman"—he realizes that the woman lying next to him is Mrs. Humphrey, whose first name he doesn't even know. He thinks back to the sex they've just had and realizes that "when he entered her she made no sound, either of protest or delight," which makes him worry that Mrs. Humphrey isn't breathing. He begins kissing her, until he finds a vein in her neck, which he also kisses, as "the alternative to taking her pulse." After confirming that Mrs. Humphrey is breathing, Simon thinks, "What next? What have I done?"

This bizarre sex scene not only confirms Simon's attraction to Grace and indicates that he is continuing to lose touch with reality—it also draws a striking parallel between Simon and Grace, who both apparently act while they are in a state of sleeping or dreaming. As in Grace's case, it is difficult to know whether Simon's claim of sleep-acting should be believed; it seems particularly ludicrous that Simon could have sex with a woman without realizing who she was. Furthermore, the fact that Mrs. Humphrey expressed neither "protest [n]or delight" seems to suggest something strange and even nonconsensual about this sexual encounter.

CHAPTER 43

Grace reports that Dr. Jordan has left Kingston for Toronto. She misses his company and worries that "when he goes away, as he is bound to do sooner or later, there will be a sad emptiness in [her] heart." She wonders what she will tell him when he returns; "I could say this," she thinks, and continues with her story, which is not in quotation marks but is now addressed in the second person directly to Dr. Jordan.

The fact that Grace continues narrating her story to Dr. Jordan even in his absence shows the comfort she takes in being able to finally tell her story to an audience. Her sense of loneliness following Dr. Jordan's departure also highlights, yet again, how alone Grace has felt her whole life.

Grace is arrested first, followed by McDermott. As the two are transported back across Lake Ontario to Canada, McDermott insists that Mr. Kinnear was most likely killed by a "suspicious-looking man" (Jeremiah) who had been "hanging around" the house, which angers Grace. Grace and McDermott are imprisoned in Toronto. Grace asks for her box of **clothes** and notes that the newspapers "sneered at [her] for referring to it as [hers]"—but, she insists, "although it was true this box and the clothes in it had once been Nancy's, they were hers no longer, as the dead have no use for such things." Grace adds, "I don't think I could have scratched myself or wiped my nose without it being written up in the newspapers, and malicious comment made on it in high-sounding phrases."

Grace's rather cold assertion that Nancy's clothes ceased to be hers the moment Nancy died speaks to the complex and ambiguous relationship between these two women. Despite the fact that Grace despised Nancy for living a life above her station, Grace seems almost to want to follow Nancy's lead; by donning her clothes, she also styles herself as a gentlewoman, rather than a servant. This passage also shows how obsessed the public became with Grace's story. Furthermore, Grace's resentment at being described in "high-sounding phrases" suggests her anger at not being able to speak for herself and in her own words.

An inquest is scheduled to be held soon after Grace's arrest, and Grace begins to worry because she can "see that feeling [is] running very much against me." The Toronto prison guards tease Grace about being hanged, and one of them tries to sexually assault her; a fellow prisoner defends Grace, telling the guard to "keep away"—"which he did mostly," Grace says.

The ostensibly casual way in which Grace mentions yet another instance in which she was sexually assaulted (by yet another male figure in power) shows how culturally normal male violence against women is. It also seems likely that Grace has learned how to describe her assaults so dispassionately as a kind of survival tactic, to prevent herself from becoming emotionally exhausted.

Grace thinks, "I will tell Dr. Jordan about this, as he likes to hear about such things, and always writes them down."

The fact that Grace is unable (or unwilling) to recognize that Dr. Jordan is interested in her sexual trauma because he finds it erotic—rather than because he feels compassion for Grace or wants to help her—implies that Grace is desperate for an audience who will hear out her story, regardless of that audience's motivation for listening.

The Inquest takes place in City Hall, in front of a large audience. Though Grace truly feels as if she had not been "present at [the murders] at all," she knows that if she says this she will be "laughed to scorn," especially since the butcher has testified to seeing and conversing with her the day of the murders. Grace tells a made-up account of the day, but feels justified in saying that she really heard the gunshot, as "indeed they found the ball from the gun, in the wood of the summer kitchen door frame, which showed I was not lying."

Grace's reluctance to state her truth—that she genuinely cannot recall the murders—at the inquest shows how aware she is that her gender predisposes her to being viewed as "mad." The comfort she takes from the evidence proving that at least part of her story is true suggests that whether or not people think her guilty is of less importance to her than whether people think she is insane.

Grace is held for three months in the Toronto prison until her trial in November. She is assigned a lawyer, Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie, in October, and he advises her to "say what must have happened, according to plausibility, rather than what [she herself] could actually recall," which Grace resolves to do. Grace spends most of the three months in solitary confinement; she talks to Mary Whitney and on one occasion hears her laughing. She also sees her dream/hallucination of the red **flowers** for the first time.

The fact that Grace's lawyer counsels her not to tell her own story but rather to tell one that is more believable shows how dismissive MacKenzie is of Grace's ability to narrate her own experience. Grace's long solitary confinement is also important, as it might help account for her confusion and distress at the trial (provided she was not actually feigning this reaction).

Grace recalls that the last time she met with Dr. Jordan he asked if she remembered Susanna Moodie's visits to the Kingston Penitentiary and the Toronto asylum. Grace said she did remember, but when Dr. Jordan said that Mrs. Moodie's account states that Grace was held in the violent ward of the asylum, Grace replied, "I do not recall behaving in a violent manner towards others, unless they did so first to me." Grace also insisted that Mrs. Moodie's account of Grace seeing red eyes following her around was inaccurate. She said she had told Mr. MacKenzie she had been seeing red spots, and when he pressed her she clarified that they were red **peonies**. "I suppose it's the more usual thing," Grace told Dr. Jordan, "to have eyes following you around. It is more what is required, under the circumstances."

Grace's closing statement in this passage shows that society has ideas about how women should behave even after they have "gone mad." This emphasizes the fact that women's behavior is constantly monitored and evaluated against societal standards of propriety. The passage also suggests that MacKenzie misrepresented the information Grace shared with him, a fact that will be confirmed in a later chapter, and which reveals that MacKenzie is a less trustworthy figure than what he has hitherto been described to be.

Grace thinks that the next thing Dr. Jordan will want to hear about when she sees him is her trial, which began on November 3rd. She recalls searching the crowd for Jeremiah, who was not present. Jamie Walsh testified against her, which pained her because she "valued his good opinion of [her], and it was a grief to lose it." Jamie also pointed out at trial that Grace was wearing Nancy's dress, which, Grace says, caused a stir akin to "the uprush of voices at the Judgment Day," and she "knew [she] was doomed."

Grace's decision to wear Nancy's dress at the trial is inexplicable—not even Grace herself tries to account for it. The fact that there are aspects of her behavior that Grace cannot explain further undermines Dr. Jordan's, and indeed the public's, conviction that there exists a hidden, concrete truth about Grace's guilt or innocence.

Grace says that when she had to testify, she tried her best to "remember the right answers," and that Mr. MacKenzie did his best to argue she was "very soft and pliable, and easily imposed upon." However, the jury found Grace guilty, and the judge sentenced her to death, at which Grace fainted and "fell on the railing made of pointed spikes that was all around the dock," sustaining an injury right next to her heart. "I could show him the scar," Grace thinks.

That MacKenzie resorts to depicting Grace as weak and impressionable reflects how society was unwilling to see her as a villainous murder—despite the fascination this also holds. MacKenzie calculates that it will be more tolerable for the public to see Grace as a weak-minded woman than to see her as capable of planning and committing violence. The passage also highlights that, at her trial, Grace tried to tell the "correct" version of events; this makes the fact that Grace is now able to tell her *true version of events even more significant.*

CHAPTER 44

Simon is traveling by train to Toronto to meet with Mr. MacKenzie. He thinks about Rachel Humphrey, who has become his mistress, and feels relieved to be far away from her. The first time they slept together, he maintains, "was an accident"; Simon thinks of himself has having been "ambushed," and Rachel herself claims she was sleepwalking. Every night since, however, Rachel has come to Simon's room. Each encounter always begins with Rachel sobbing, worried about what her husband would think and what might happen if she and Simon are discovered. Simon comforts her and though Rachel keeps up "a pretence of aversion," Simon feels sure that his role is "to overcome" her resistance. He reflects: "At the moment of her climax—which she attempts to disguise as pain—she always says *no*." He wonders "what idiocies he has uttered" while in bed with Rachel. "How far, exactly, will he go?" he wonders. "How far in."

It is difficult to know whether Simon's description of his affair is trustworthy. The fact that he has consistently had fantasies involving him overpowering women makes it seem suspicious that Rachel so perfectly fits the mold of his fantasy woman—someone who pretends to be reluctant, but secretly wants to be seduced by him. The fact that Simon's mental state has been degenerating over the course of the novel further opens up the possibility that his affair with Rachel has been more coercive than consensual.

Simon's train pulls into the Toronto train station, and as he disembarks, Simon resolves to leave thoughts of Rachel behind him. He finds himself wishing he were in London or Paris, where he would have "no ties, no connections" and "would be able to lose himself completely."

Simon's strange desire to go somewhere and become anonymous seems to reflect his increasingly tenuous grip on the reality of his life.

CHAPTER 45

Simon meets with Mr. MacKenzie, curious to find out how he managed to save Grace from the death sentence. MacKenzie explains that the Grace-McDermott case was dumped into his lap by a colleague who said, "Everyone knows you'll lose, because there's no doubt as to their guilt; but it will be the *style* in which you lose that will count." The two discuss Grace's amnesia, and MacKenzie advises Simon that "criminals will read about themselves endlessly, if given the chance. They are as vain in that way as authors."

The most noteworthy aspect of this passage is the way MacKenzie links authors and criminals; this comment effectively belittles Grace completely. Furthermore, MacKenzie's comment is ironic, given the fact that he seems particularly self-congratulatory about the way that he handled Grace's case.

Simon asks specific questions about how MacKenzie argued Grace's case. MacKenzie says he felt no guilt in "destroy[ing] the reputation of the unfortunate Montgomery woman," who was found to be pregnant at the time of her death based on an autopsy. He also explains how he handled the slippery question of who was wearing whose shirt, trying his best to pin some blame on Jeremiah. Finally, he says, he did his best to absolve Grace despite her insistence on wearing Nancy's **clothes** at the trial and the fact that she "had muddied the trail considerably" by telling three different versions of her story—one at her arrest, one at the inquest, and one at the trial and in her confession.

MacKenzie's defense of Grace relies primarily on a smear campaign against Nancy, which ultimately uses the same logic employed by McDermott: Nancy was a "slut," so she deserved to die. The fact that Grace has already told three different versions of her story puts the version she is currently telling Dr. Jordan in question—is it an amalgamation of her three previous stories, or a new version entirely? Despite Grace's young age at the time of her trial, it is difficult not to read some sense of guilt into the fact that she was unable to give a consistent account of the murders.

Simon then questions MacKenzie about Mrs. Moodie's account of Grace. MacKenzie's evasive answers make Simon realize that MacKenzie likely invented the idea of Grace being haunted by a pair of eyes; he wonders "what other parts of [Moodie's] narrative were due to MacKenzie's own flamboyant tastes as a raconteur."

Simon's realization reveals that MacKenzie is just as vain as he believes Grace and other criminals to be. Though Simon does not point it out, the fact that Mrs. Moodie is blamed for being an exaggerated storyteller is grossly unfair, given that the person who was actually manipulating Grace's experiences was MacKenzie.

Finally, Simon confesses to an unshakeable feeling that Grace is lying to him. MacKenzie responds that "the stories [Grace] told should ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood. They belong in another realm altogether." MacKenzie insists that Grace is trying to keep Simon wrapped up in her story because she has fallen in love with him. He then claims that Grace was "besotted" with *him* at the time of her trial, and he proceeds to make lascivious comments about her; Simon struggles to hide his rage at MacKenzie's "depraved" language. Still, he wonders, "What has Grace really been thinking about him, as she sewed and recounted?"

Simon cannot rid himself of his feeling of possessiveness towards Grace, suggesting that Grace's initial description of Simon as "a collector" was accurate. The passage also shows that, down to a person, all the men who have been designated to protect Grace and represent her interests—her lawyer, her doctors, the prison guards, her employers, her father—have betrayed her by sexually harassing or assaulting her in some way. The scale of the abuse that Grace has faced likens the pervasiveness of possessive patriarchal views to a kind of corruption.

MacKenzie concludes by saying that he was able to use "several strong petitions" to help commute Grace's death sentence. He explains: "By that time the death sentence had been pronounced against both of them and the trial had been closed, since it was thought unnecessary to go into the details of the second case." He maintains that if she had been tried for Nancy's murder, Grace would have been hanged. "But in your opinion," Simon says, "she was innocent. "No," MacKenzie replies. "In my opinion, she was guilty as sin."

The fact that Mr. Kinnear's murder was tried but Nancy's was not is hugely significant, because it suggests that the public was more concerned about the death of a gentleman (even one who was, in life, something of a social outcast) than a pregnant woman. This shows how deeply the justice system disempowers women, and MacKenzie's assertion that Grace would have hanged if Nancy's murder had been tried suggests that justice was never served Nancy.

CHAPTER 46

Grace wonders when Dr. Jordan will return from Toronto. She knows he must be investigating whether she is guilty, but she thinks: "He won't find it out that way. He doesn't understand yet that guilt comes to you not from the things you've done, but from the things that others have done to you."

Again, Grace's unique understanding of justice is complex and unconventional. Though Grace refuses to elaborate, it seems likely that her somewhat confusing philosophy springs from the fact that she has been subjected to sexual abuse from an extremely young age.

Earlier in the day, Grace had bathed along with her fellow prisoners. The same woman who earlier teased Grace about Dr. Jordan again asked if Grace was in love with the doctor, to which she replied, "I've never been in love with any man and I don't plan to start now." Later, she was sent to the Governor's house, where she worked alongside the laundress, Clarrie, and Dora. Clarrie commented that the only reason God must have put rich people on earth was "to dirty up the laundry." Dora agrees, saying, "They dirty it up as fast as I can get it clean, and the both of them are in the dirtying of it together if the truth was to come out." Grace felt a "chill" come over her and did not ask Dora to elaborate, as she "didn't want her saying anything bad about Dr. Jordan."

Grace's assertion that she has never been in love with a man and never will could be interpreted as evidence that she is gay or asexual. This passage is also important because it shows that Grace has become fond enough of Dr. Jordan that she is having difficulty hearing any story about him that might change her opinion of him. This suggests that Grace's ability to reconcile or at least tolerate conflicting ideas does not extend to her opinion of Dr. Jordan, likely because she so desperately wants to see him as a good man, and even as a friend.

Grace says that she is to be hypnotized by Jeremiah (Dr. DuPont) when Dr. Jordan returns. The Governor's wife has explained the hypnosis process to her, but Grace still feels "not at all sure [she] want[s] to have [her memory] back."

The fact that Grace is afraid of her own memory suggests that she does not believe in her own innocence. Rather, it seems that the countless traumas she has experienced might make her reluctant to expose herself to more repressed trauma.

Grace is now spending the evening doing some knitting, busying herself with thinking about what she would put in her keepsake album, if she had one. She considers the following items: "A piece of coarse cotton, from my Penitentiary **nightdress**. A square of blood-stained petticoat. A strip of kerchief, white with blue **flowers**. Love-in-a-mist."

Grace's imagined keepsake album almost exactly mirrors the quilt she ends up making after she's released from prison. Because Mary's handkerchief is gone, having served as evidence in Grace's trial, Grace includes a petticoat of Mary's in the quilt. Grace's desire to preserve even the most unpleasant memories of her life highlights her commitment to telling a true story, which she earlier expressed to Dr. Jordan. This passage is also important because it is unclear whether the blood-stained petticoat Grace imagines would be the bloody nightdress Mary died in or the outfit in which Nancy was murdered. This detail thus serves to explicitly link Nancy and Mary, showing how important both women are to Grace's life.

CHAPTER 47

The day after his meeting with Mr. MacKenzie, Simon sets off to visit Mr. Kinnear's former house in Richmond Hill. A housekeeper shows him around the house, and the tour makes Simon feel like he has been to "some discreditable peepshow." He then visits Mr. Kinnear's and Nancy's graves. He picks a **rose** from the bush growing over Nancy's grave, "with some half-formed notion of taking it back to Grace," but then he reconsiders.

Simon's visit to Mr. Kinnear's former house is proof of his persistent desire to find out the "truth" behind Grace's story, and his feeling of having been to a peepshow again suggests a link between sex and violence.

Simon spends the night in a hotel halfway between Richmond Hill and Toronto. The next day, before taking the afternoon train back to Kingston, he tries to find Mary Whitney's grave. He finds a headstone with her name on it, but thinks: "She could be an old woman, a wife, a small infant, anyone at all. Nothing has been proved. But nothing has been disproved, either."

Again, Simon is doing his best to ascertain whether he can believe Grace's story by obtaining concrete proof of her claims. The fact that Mary Whitney exists does next to nothing to corroborate Grace's story about her, which once again highlights the slippery nature of truth and also seems to suggest a reluctance on Simon's part to take Grace's word at face-value.

On the train back to Kingston, Simon realizes that "Grace Marks is the only woman he's ever met that he would wish to marry." He wonders if he would've married Grace had he met her before the murders, but decides he wouldn't have. "Grace would have been entirely different from the woman he now knows," he thinks. "A young girl, scarcely formed; tepid, bland, and tasteless. A flat landscape." He pictures himself embracing Grace, pressing his **mouth** to her, stamping the word *Murderess* on "her throat like a brand."

It is difficult to know what to make of Simon's professed attraction to Grace. He is certainly excited by the fact that she is "unconventional"—she is potentially both violent and avidly sexual, two qualities that the women Simon has known, especially those of his social class, are not allowed to be. But Simon also seems to enjoy the fact that Grace's possible guilt gives him power over her: he is able to exert a kind of moral superiority. Despite the fact that he thinks he would not have been attracted to Grace were she a "bland" non-murderess, it would appear that underneath Simon's attraction to Grace's notoriety and mysteriousness is still a desire to exercise his power over a woman.

CHAPTER 48

One of the epigraphs that begins this section of the book is the first stanza of a poem by Emily Dickinson, reading: "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind— / As if my Brain had split— / I tried to match it—Seam by Seam— / But could not make it fit."

This quotation foreshadows the reveal that Grace has, essentially, a split personality—a result of Mary Whitney's ghost intermittently possessing Grace's body.

Simon waits in Mrs. Quennell's library, along with the Governor's wife, the Reverend Verringer, and Miss Lydia. It is the day of Grace's hypnosis, and Simon is secretly as "eager as a schoolboy at a carnival," hoping to be "astonished." Dr. DuPont enters the room, leading Grace. Simon notes that Grace's eyes are "fixed upon DuPont with the timorousness, tremulousness, the pale and silent appeal, which Simon—he now realizes—has been hoping for in vain."

Again we see how other characters tend to treat Grace as a spectacle. The fact that she is so attuned to this tendency in others makes it all the more curious that Grace has not been critical of Simon in this regard. Another noteworthy aspect of this passage is the fact that Simon expresses a wish that Grace were vulnerable, dependent, and, perhaps most importantly, silent. This not only affirms the fact that Simon takes a narcissistic, if not sadistic pleasure in being superior to women, but it also casts doubt on Simon's claim that he finds Mrs. Humphrey's "weakness" off-putting. It seems more and more likely that Simon is actually attracted to this quality in Rachel Humphrey, and by extension, that he might also be attracted to the fact that she resists him.

DuPont explains the procedure to the observers and to Grace. He then places Grace into "a neuro-hypnotic sleep," a phenomenon similar to one that can be "observed in fish." He tells Grace that when she wakes she "will remember nothing of what is done here." DuPont then drapes a shroud-like veil over Grace's head, to help her concentration. As DuPont begins to ask Grace a question, there is a loud knock in the room. Mrs. Quennell insists that there is a spirit in the room; annoyed, DuPont demands that Mrs. Quennell use her Spiritualist training to send the spirit away, which she does.

The knock in the room foreshadows the appearance of Mary Whitney's spirit. Also note Dr. DuPont's comment, which likens Grace—in her hypnotic state, at least—to a fish. Even DuPont, like Simon, can be dismissive of the female mind, while also being intrigued by it.

Simon persuades DuPont to ask Grace whether she had relations with McDermott; it is "the one thing he most wants to know," he realizes. Grace laughs, but Simon notes that "it doesn't sound like Grace." Grace says that she used to meet McDermott at night. She says, "I'd let him kiss me, and touch me as well, all over, Doctor, the same places you'd like to touch me, because I can always tell, I know what you're thinking when you sit in that stuffy little sewing room with me." Simon, shocked but intrigued, continues feeding DuPont questions about the murder to ask Grace. Grace admits to strangling Nancy, but then gleefully says, "You've deceived yourselves! I am not Grace! Grace knew nothing about it!" When the voice hints that it was her handkerchief that strangled Nancy, Simon realizes the voice he is hearing belongs to Mary Whitney. Mary's voice admits that she inhabited Grace's "**clothing**" (i.e. her body) when Grace forgot to open the **window** the night Mary died.

On a plot level, the novel never makes clear whether Grace is actually *being possessed by Mary Whitney's spirit, or if Grace is feigning the entire hypnosis scene, perhaps in collaboration with Dr. DuPont (aka Jeremiah). Thematically this scene is important because it affirms that Simon has been interviewing Grace more out of salacious self-interest than out of medical curiosity, and Grace is at least subconsciously aware of this. One reason that the reader might interpret the spiritual possession storyline to be inaccurate is because Mary-as-Grace calls Simon out—it seems quite possible that this might actually be Grace herself speaking, finally confronting Simon under the guise of speaking in another woman's voice. This passage also underscores the centrality of clothing symbolism in the novel; Mary referring to Grace's body as clothing strengthens the idea that putting on someone else's clothes amounts to trying on that person's very identity.*

Mary begs Simon not to tell Grace that she is being possessed. When Simon asks why, Mary replies, "Do you want to see her back in the Asylum? I liked it there at first, I could talk out loud there. I could laugh. I could tell what happened. But no one listened to me." Soon, Mary's spirit leaves the room and Dr. DuPont brings Grace out of her "sleep." When Grace awakens, she says she had been dreaming of her mother. DuPont asks Mrs. Quennell to take Grace somewhere she can lie down. As Grace leaves, Simon notices that "she walks lightly enough now, and seems almost happy."

Mary-as-Grace insists that she "was not heard" at the asylum; this strongly underscores the importance of allowing women like Grace to tell their own stories and to have them believed and validated by society. Though not directly, Atwood seems to be suggesting that the fact that society has stifled Grace's storytelling ability has somehow cause her to have this "split personality"—or, perhaps more accurately, has made her feel that feigning a split personality is necessary in order for her to finally be heard.

CHAPTER 49

Simon, DuPont, and Reverend Verringer remain in the library. Simon feels "unsettled, and unsure of his intellectual ground." DuPont explains that what they have just witnessed may be an example of dédoublement or double consciousness, a phenomenon where a person displays two different personalities when awake and asleep; "the two halves," DuPont says, "[have] no knowledge of each other." Simon remains silent, while DuPont and the Reverend briefly debate the religious implications of such a phenomenon, with Verringer declaring "We cannot be mere patchworks!"

This passage highlights how difficult it is to establish objective, certain truth. It also contains important historical references to the question of the nature of the soul. Verringer's horrified statement, "We cannot be mere patchworks!" is striking because it echoes the imagery of quilts that recurs throughout the novel, thus associating a fundamental quality of the soul ("patchwork-ness") with womanhood.

Simon walks home alone, feeling completely panicked. He realizes: "There's no way he can write the report Verringer desires without perjuring himself. The safest thing [for his reputation as a physician] would be to write nothing at all, but Verringer will hardly let him off the hook so easily." Frustrated, he turns his thoughts to Rachel—"something he can grapple with, take hold of." He looks forward to having violent sex with her, including hitting her and making her cry.

Simon's frustration with Grace and her tendency to "slip through his fingers" indicates how desperately he wants to exert power over her, and how flummoxed he is by the fact that the power dynamic between the two of them has shifted. The fact that part of his attraction to Rachel is that he can grapple with and take hold of her shows that he physically wants to possess and manipulate women's bodies—a disturbing quality (needless to say) in a physician. At this point in the novel, it is also difficult to ascertain whether Simon's claim that physical violence during sex is something for which Rachel has actually "begged."

When he enters the house, he finds Rachel waiting for him, crying. She tells Simon she's had a letter from her husband, Major Humphrey; he will be returning to Rachel the day after tomorrow. Rachel is panicked and tries to convince Simon to kill the Major and "bury him in the garden." Simon is bewildered and "puts his **mouth** on hers, to silence her." Rachel interprets this as consent to her plan and kisses him enthusiastically. They have sex.

Simon's instinct to "silence" Rachel shows for the umpteenth time that he is not interested in her human suffering; rather, he sees her only as a sexual object.

Afterwards, Simon lies in bed and thinks about what would happen if he were to follow Rachel's plan. He imagines them escaping to the United States, where he will "never be free of Rachel"—yet he comforts himself that she will also become "an unknown woman, of the kind found floating in canals and other bodies of water." Simon then thinks, "Who would suspect him?" He hopes that Rachel will have forgotten about her plan in the morning. The next day Simon convinces Rachel that he is sick and needs her to go to the Governor's wife and request from her the name of a doctor who can treat him. Once Rachel is gone, Simon writes her a letter, explaining that he must return home to his sick mother. He also leaves some money. He leaves on the train, trying to decide what he will do next. On the train he also thinks about Grace "waiting for his footfall at the door." He falls asleep and dreams of Grace; when he awakens he presses his **mouth** against the train **window**.

Simon's sinister fantasy about the aftermath of Rachel's plan shows that he could see himself killing Rachel (ostensibly because she would, at that point, be the only witness to his murder of Major Humphrey, but also just so Simon could be "free" of her). Perhaps this accounts for why Simon leaves in such a panic: he has finally recognized his capacity for violence toward women (which has been obvious throughout the preceding chapters) and is so horrified by it that he feels the need to remove himself from temptation. If this is true, then Simon is in some ways mirroring James McDermott, who blamed Nancy for her own death and for that of Mr. Kinnear. The fact that Simon feels he must leave Kingston to avoid killing Rachel (and, first, her husband) implies that Rachel is somehow "asking" to be killed in the same way Nancy was—by being, in McDermott's word, "a slut."

CHAPTER 50

This chapter consists of several letters. The first is Simon's farewell letter to Rachel. It is signed: "You know how much I admire your courage in the face of adversity, and how I respect you; and I hope you will find it in your heart to feel the same."

Simon's saccharine plea for forgiveness, which plays upon Rachel's "woman's heart and sensibility," suggests that he is still trying to exert power over her by virtue of stereotyping her.

The next letter is from Simon's mother, Mrs. Jordan, to Rachel Humphrey. Mrs. Jordan writes that she is returning seven letters that Rachel has sent to Simon, and she cautions Rachel that "it is wise to avoid the expression of one's feelings in letters, which must run the gauntlet of the public posts, and may fall into the hands of persons who may be tempted to read them unbeknownst to the sender."

Mrs. Jordan's word of advice to Rachel suggests that she herself has read Rachel's letters, showing a weak point in the relative power of the written word—written letters can find their way to the wrong audience. Mrs. Jordan also seems to be chiding Rachel for having expressed her feelings at all—yet another indication that women are expected to unquestioningly allow men to define the terms of romantic relationships. Finally, though Mrs. Jordan does not explicitly demean Rachel for her low-class status, it seems likely that the class differences between Mrs. Jordan and her son's former paramour have inflected the letter she has written her.

The third letter is from Grace to Dr. Jordan. She writes that when she learned he had left for good she fainted. She entreats Dr. Jordan to fulfill his promise of writing a letter on her behalf, in order that she may be freed from prison.

This is the first instance of Grace actually writing down her thoughts.

The fourth letter is from Simon to his friend Edward Murchie. Simon writes that he "was forced to make a hasty escape from Kingston" and that "someday over a glass of sherry" he may tell Edward all that happened there. He confesses, "[I] have come near to addling my own wits, in my assiduous attempts to unpick those of another." He also tells Ed that he believes he is "doomed to wander the face of the earth alone." He anticipates serving in the looming Civil War, writing: "Given my present tumultuous and morbid mental state, it will be a relief to have a duty of some kind set before me."

Simon's claim that he has almost "addled" his own wits is difficult to interpret. It speaks yet again to the power of Grace's storytelling, but also seems to highlight the fact that Simon's wits were fundamentally no match for Grace's. Simon intends, it would seem, to cast Grace as mysterious—perhaps even irrationally so—but he inadvertently ends up pointing out how strong she is. Not only is she able to tell all that has happened to her, but she was able to survive *it—while Simon was hardly able to escape the telling intact.*

The fifth letter is from Grace to Jeremiah, who is now going by the name Geraldo Ponti. It is dated 1861, two years after Dr. Jordan's year in Kingston. Grace writes: "Since the Hypnotism, the people here seem to treat me better, and with more esteem, although perhaps it is only that they are more afraid of me; sometimes it is hard to tell the difference." Grace also informs Jeremiah that the Reverend Verringer has married Miss Lydia, and that though she has heard nothing from Dr. Jordan, she has heard many rumors about him and his landlady. Dora has even claimed "it was a wonder he hadn't killed this lady and buried the body in the yard outside, as she'd seen the spade for it standing ready, and a grave already dug."

Grace gestures to an important quality of human nature: that fear can mimic, and perhaps even produce, esteem. Yet, though she does not mention it here, Grace has also experienced the opposite: the fact that people fear her, not only as a potential murderess but also as a woman who, in several ways, bucks societal expectation, has led people to demean and mistreat her. This passage of Grace's letter is also important because Dora's perspective on Dr. Jordan suggests that he may have been even more unstable than the reader was able to perceive from the narration, since it was limited to Dr. Jordan's perspective.

Grace also writes that the Governor's wife questioned her about whether Dr. Jordan ever made any sexual advances toward her. She tells Jeremiah she does not "believe everything that was being said against [Dr. Jordan], as [she knows] what it is to have lies told about a person, and you not able to defend yourself." Grace says she is beginning to become depressed "about [her] wasted life," and that she still wonders what Jeremiah meant when he once told her that they were "of the same sort." She asks, "Why did you want to help me? Was it as a challenge, and to outwit the others [...] or was it out of affection and fellow-feeling?"

Here, Grace's strange fondness for Dr. Jordan—despite his objectification of her—finds an explanation. In the same way she felt sympathy for McDermott because he was lonely, Grace seems to have felt sympathy for Dr. Jordan because he was sad, and her sympathy has only grown since Dr. Jordan has been maligned. Grace's rhetorical question to Jeremiah also seems like a clue that Grace and Jeremiah had been in cahoots regarding the hypnotism.

The sixth letter is dated 1862, and is from Mrs. Jordan to Rachel Humphrey. She writes, "To threaten to do yourself an injury [...] might carry weight with an impressionable and tender-hearted young man, but it does not, with his more experienced Mother." She informs Rachel that Simon served and was injured in the Union army; he is suffering from amnesia and, according to Mrs. Jordan, he does not recall "the period of time he spent in the city of Kingston." Mrs. Jordan offers her condolences on the death of Major Humphrey, but writes that it is her duty to inform Rachel that Simon is as good as engaged to one Faith Cartwright—though, she writes, "he persists in believing that [Faith] is called Grace."

Simon's amnesia is incredibly ironic, because it effectively completes the role reversal between Simon and Grace. Simon, as an invalid, is now dependent on his mother and fiancée to care for him, and he has suffered amnesia that parallel's Grace's. The fact that the reader sees two letters from Mrs. Jordan in this chapter but none from Rachel is also important because, on a meta level, it continues the erasure, started by Simon, of Rachel Humphrey as a full character.

The seventh letter is dated 1867, and is from Reverend Verringer to Dr. Bannerling. He writes to request Dr. Bannerling's support in securing a pardon for Grace, saying, "It moves me to tears to think how this poor woman has been wronged through lack of scientific understanding."

The tone of Reverend Verringer's letter seems to confirm that he is a good-hearted and well-intentioned character. His characterization of Grace's suffering and long imprisonment as a result of a "lack of scientific understanding" again raises the question of whether Grace is suffering from a diagnosable dissociative disorder, or whether her apparent "double consciousness" has other causes.

The eighth and final letter is a reply from Dr. Bannerling to Reverend Verringer. He writes that he is "astonished that anyone with a medical degree would allow himself to be imposed upon by such a blatant piece of charlatanism and preposterous tomfoolery as a 'neuro-hypnotic trance,'" which he thinks is a front for men to ask young women "impertinent and offensive questions and [order] them to perform immodest acts, without the latter appearing to consent to it." He asks that the Reverend "be pleased to desist from pestering" him with further requests for assistance with Grace's pardon.

Dr. Bannerling's "concern" that neuro-hypnotism is illegitimate because it makes women patients vulnerable to sexual assault is deeply ironic, since Bannerling himself sexually assaulted Grace while she was under his medical care in the asylum. Furthermore, the fact that Bannerling seems to be of the opinion that women are prone to "perform[ing] immodest acts" while pretending not to consent (as a way of flouting society's "ban" on female sexuality) suggests an underlying misogyny that is disturbing and reminiscent of many of Simon's claims about his relationship with Rachel Humphrey.

CHAPTER 51

Grace opens this chapter by saying: "I have often thought of writing to you and informing you of my good fortune, and I've written many letters to you in my head; and when I've arrived at the right way of saying things I will set pen to paper, and thus you will have news of me." She continues to narrate her life, ostensibly addressing Dr. Jordan. Grace first hears about her pardon from the prison warden's daughter, Janet (she adds that there have been several new governors and wardens since Dr. Jordan left Kingston). When Janet tells her the news, Grace feels as if she might faint. Janet assures her that she really has been pardoned; Grace says, "I could see that she felt some tears were in order, and I shed several."

That Grace narrates this chapter as an unwritten letter to Dr. Jordan is important for two main reasons. The first is it highlights how important it is to Grace to tell her story in "the right way"; she will not write it down, as she did the two letters to Dr. Jordan included in the preceding chapter, until she has worked out the exact way to word everything. The second is that it emphasizes how important Dr. Jordan was to Grace as a listener; it matters that Grace conceives of herself as writing her story down in letter format, which inherently assumes an audience, rather than merely writing it down in, say, a journal entry format. Finally, note how Grace forces herself to cry to conform to Janet's expectations. This shows that Grace's emotions are far more complex than society expects or allows her (not) to express.

That night Grace is "made a fuss of" and allowed to sleep in the Warden's house. She feels almost as if she is dying and being reborn. At breakfast in the morning the Warden and his family beam at her, and she thinks, "I have been rescued, and now I must act like someone who has been rescued." Grace finds it strange that she has become "an object of pity rather than of horror and fear"; she thinks this "calls for a different arrangement of the face."

All of Grace's comments about her release from prison relate to the question of power. The fact that she feels she has become an object of pity and must behave as someone who has been acted upon shows that she views her liberation as a stripping away of her agency. This passage also shows that society expects Grace to act in a certain way; there is an accepted narrative of how released prisoners should act, and Grace must now conform to it.

After breakfast, Janet asks Grace why she seems so depressed, and Grace replies that she has no family or friends to go to now that she has been released. Her pardon thus seems more like "a death sentence" than a "passport to liberty." Janet tells Grace that "a home has been provided" for her, which Grace thinks "is what you say of a dog or a horse that is too old to work any more, and that you don't wish to keep yourself or have put down."

Again, Grace feels that being freed from prison has actually reduced her from a state of full personhood to a state of less-than-human. It is as if justice cannot retroactively be served to her. This section also emphasizes how deeply lonely Grace's life is and always has been.

Janet helps Grace unpack the box of her things that was put into storage upon her imprisonment. Most of Grace's **clothes** are moth-eaten, so Janet hunts up some material and other clothes from her friends. Grace is unsettled by the drastic fashion changes that have occurred in the twenty-nine years she has been in prison, particularly the fact that "there is less difference in dress between maid and mistress now than there used to be." Grace is grateful for Janet's help in assembling a wardrobe for her. She says, "I was still fearful of what was to come, but at least I would look like an ordinary person and no one would stare, and that is worth a great deal."

This passage highlights the importance of clothing, which will allow Grace to escape being treated as a spectacle, as she has been while imprisoned. It also emphasizes how drastically the world has changed during Grace's long imprisonment; Grace's discomfort with the more egalitarian fashion of the day shows how important clear, visible class distinction has always been to her sense of identity.

CHAPTER 52

Grace leaves the Penitentiary on August 7, 1872. The Warden and Janet will be accompanying her to her new home. Grace feels a twinge of regret upon leaving the prison, because "to go from a familiar thing, however undesirable, into the unknown, is always a matter for apprehension." Grace, the Warden, and Janet make their way to Ithaca, New York, where, Janet says, "a gentleman"—an old friend of Grace's—is waiting for Grace.

It's implied that Grace's release from prison means she has been justly treated by the judiciary system. However, Grace's feeling of regret complicates the question of justice, implying that the committee who worked for her release may have, in some ways, done her a disservice by forcing her to transplant her life—an experience that she found incredibly painful in her life before the murders. Yet again, Grace is without a home.

Grace arrives in Ithaca and comes face to face with Jamie Walsh, who collapses at her feet. The two go to a hotel where Jamie explains that after Grace's trial he took a job in Toronto, and then moved to the States. He is now a childless widower. He begs Grace to forgive him, which she says she did "readily," telling him, she "would no doubt have been put in prison anyway, even if he hadn't mentioned Nancy's dresses." Jamie proposes marriage, and Grace eventually consents, even though she has a hard time "viewing him as a full-grown man" and not the awkward boy she knew. Grace stays at the hotel for the few days that it takes for the wedding to be arranged. The day of the ceremony, she says, "I remembered Aunt Pauline saying so many years before that I would no doubt marry beneath me, and wondered what she would think now."

Grace's fatalism comes to the forefront here; it's as if she feels her marriage to Jamie Walsh was fated, not only because her Aunt Pauline predicted it but because the apples she once peeled with Mary Whitney also indicated that she would marry a man whose name began with a J. This adds a sort of tragedy to Grace's life, as if she is powerless to affect anything that happens to her—which essentially reduces her to an object, since she possesses very little if any free will in this scenario. Grace's passivity becomes a kind of entrapment, and the fact that her life is arranged for her—by the Warden, and perhaps even by some divine power—suggests that she is still, in a sense, imprisoned, despite having left the penitentiary.

CHAPTER 53

Grace says that it is "almost thirty years to the day, since when not yet sixteen years of age, [she] first went up the long driveway to Mr. Kinnear's." She is sitting on her "own verandah in [her] own rocking chair," looking at the **flowers** in front of her house. She says, "On such days I think, This is like Heaven. Although Heaven was not a place I ever used to think of myself as going." Grace has been married to Jamie for almost a year, and she describes the house they share; she specifies that she vetoed Jamie's desire to hire a maid, "prefer[ring] to do the work of the house [her]self."

Grace's description of her new life indicates that her greatest happiness comes from owning her own house, highlighting the importance of women being able to exert power in this way. Her insistence on acting as maid in her own house also shows how important her identity as a working girl continues to be, even now that she is a middle-aged woman. Grace's moving, ambiguous statement that Heaven "was not" a place she considered open to her seems to hint that perhaps her mind has since changed. This is one of the first moments of the novel that Grace seems to be gentle with herself, allowing for the possibility of peace in her life to come.

Grace says that two months ago, in April, she saw an advertisement for a medium named Gerald Bridges and realized it was Jeremiah. She wound up passing him on the street and he winked at her. The encounter made her wonder what would have happened if she had accepted Jeremiah's offer to run away with him. "Only God knows," she says, "whether it would have been better or worse; and I have now done all the running away I have time for in this life."

Grace's meditations here seem to contradict her earlier fatalistic statements; she admits that things would have been different, for better or for worse, if she had run away with Jeremiah. To the last, Grace's notions of religion, justice, and fate remain complicated and difficult to parse. Another noteworthy element here is Grace's conviction that she has done "all the running away" she plans to for her life. This is a curious statement, since the only time Grace ran away in the strictest sense of the word is when she escaped with McDermott to the States after the murders. This claim thus raises the possibility that Grace considers other moments in her life—perhaps her emigration from Ireland, for example—as a kind of running away.

Grace says that "things go on very well" between her and her husband, but that she has something to reveal to Dr. Jordan, since she has "no close woman friend [she] can trust." She says that sometimes Jamie holds her hand and says, "To think of the sufferings I have caused you." He then prompts her to tell some part of her life story, and, Grace says, "the worse I make the coarse talk and the proddings of the keepers, the better he likes it. He listens to all of that like a child listening to a fairy tale, as if it is something wonderful, and then he begs me to tell him yet more." This upsets Grace because she "would as soon forget about that portion of [her] life." "Now that I come to think of it," she says to Dr. Jordan, "you were as eager as Mr. Walsh is to hear about my sufferings and my hardships in life." She says that, though she never understood what Dr. Jordan was "aiming at," talking to him "did make [her] feel [she] was of some use in this world."

This passage is difficult to interpret. The fact that Jamie compels Grace to consistently relive her trauma and sexual abuse, and that he finds these details arousing, shows that even the "good" male characters of this novel are guilty of exploiting women for their own sexual pleasure. Grace's description of her forced storytelling for her new husband reads almost as a form of assault in itself. The reason this passage is so challenging is because Grace acknowledges that Dr. Jordan did essentially the same thing as Jamie—yet she took pleasure in seeing Dr. Jordan's excited reaction to her stories. Perhaps this is because Dr. Jordan, unlike Jamie, was a complete outsider with regard to Grace's life story, or perhaps Grace has a deep, inscrutable connection to Dr. Jordan, despite his flaws (a connection that mirrors the one she seems to have felt with McDermott). The fact that Grace is acutely aware and critical of the attempt by other (male) characters to exploit, fetishize, and commodify her pain makes it even more confusing as to why she excuses Dr. Jordan's attempts to do the very same.

Grace adds that Jamie always begins to undress her after she finishes "a few stories of torment and misery," asking, "Will you ever forgive me?" Grace admits that this annoys her. "The truth is," she says, "that very few understand the truth about forgiveness. It is not the culprits who need to be forgiven; rather it is the victims, because they are the ones who cause all the trouble." Grace insists that it would be "much better" if Jamie would forgive *her*, and she says she doesn't feel "quite right" about forgiving him because she sees it as "telling a lie." However, she says, "I suppose it isn't the first lie I've told; but as Mary Whitney used to say, a little white lie such as the angels tell is a small price to pay for peace and quiet." Grace says she thinks often of Mary; sometimes Grace even dreams she is back at Mr. Kinnear's house, or in the penitentiary. Sitting on her verandah, she pinches herself—"but it remains true" that she is in her own home.

While difficult to fully understand, Grace's notion of justice seems to suggest that she has internalized the idea that people (particularly women) who flout social codes deserve the punishment they receive. However, this seems at odds with Grace's deep and lifelong grief over Mary Whitney's death; does Grace really *blame Mary for having died, instead of society for having culturally pressured Mary into aborting her out-of-wedlock pregnancy? Perhaps Grace's complex view of forgiveness is significant because it reflects her overwhelming sense of grief at having lost all the female figures in her life that mattered to her: her mother, Mary, and Nancy. It seems that Grace cannot help but blame these women for leaving her alone in life, and this is why she has developed the conviction that victims rather than culprits need to be forgiven.*

Grace says she has something else to tell Dr. Jordan that she has shared with no one else. She says that, though she will turn forty-six in a month, she suspects that she is pregnant—though she wonders if perhaps she actually has a tumor, like the one that killed her mother. Because she has such a strong aversion to doctors, she has decided not to go to one; instead she will wait for time to tell.

Grace's possible pregnancy highlights the way that women's bodies are sites of both life and of death in a way that men's aren't, and never can be. The fact that Grace is so scarred by her abuse at the hands of physicians that she isn't able to know whether she is pregnant or terminally ill (like her mother) underscores how society denigrates and tries to destroy women—perhaps because *of the very power that they innately possess.*

Grace says that on the afternoons when she sits on her verandah she works on a **quilt**, the very first one she has ever made for herself. It is a Tree of Paradise quilt, and she thinks the singular tree is more fitting than the two trees in the Bible; she believes that "there was only one [tree], and that the Fruit of Life and the Fruit of Good and Evil were the same." She says that she intends to embroider snakes into the quilt, because "without a snake or two, the main part of the story would be missing." The three triangles of the Tree are meant to be made of two colors—"dark for the leaves and a lighter colour for the fruits"—but Grace says there will be three triangles in her tree that will be different. One will be made of Mary Whitney's white **petticoat**, one of the yellow prison nightdress Grace took with her from the Penitentiary, and one of the pink and white floral dress that Nancy wore on the day Grace arrived at Mr. Kinnear's and that Grace wore when she escaped on the ferry to Lewiston. The final line of the novel is: "And so we will all be together."

The ending passage of the novel is moving because it shows how Grace continually challenges power. The fact that Grace essentially delivers her own radical interpretation of the Bible shows how sophisticated she is in her thinking and philosophizing, and the way she "writes" down this reinterpretation by weaving it into her quilt shows how women use the tools that they have available to them to resist and remake the dominant institutions that would keep them powerless. Grace's quilt is also important because it shows how important Nancy is to her, despite the fact that Grace seems often to have hated her while she was alive (and possibly even murdered her). In this way Grace's quilt also represents the collective solidarity of women, and the fact that women, especially those who would buck the social constraints imposed upon them, should—even must—band together if they hope to be free and happy.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Grimm, Alexandra. "*Alias Grace*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 7 Feb 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Grimm, Alexandra. "*Alias Grace*." LitCharts LLC, February 7, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alias-grace.

To cite any of the quotes from *Alias Grace* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Atwood, Margaret. Alias Grace. Anchor Books. 1997.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Atwood, Margaret. Alias Grace. New York: Anchor Books. 1997.