Jasper Jones

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CRAIG SILVEY

Silvey grew up in a small town in Western Australia, on which the town of Corrigan in *Jasper Jones* is loosely modeled. He was a precocious child who spent huge lengths of time indoors reading books, and his favorite authors were American Southerners like Harper Lee and William Faulkner. Charlie Bucktin, the protagonist of *Jasper Jones*, shares many of his habits and literary tastes with Silvey. When he was only 19, Silvey completed his first novel, entitled *Rhubarb*. It was a minor success, earning him good notices and a place in the prestigious "Books Alive" campaign. Four years after publishing *Rhubarb*, Silvey published *Jasper Jones*, which won several notable literary prizes, including the Printz Honor award from the American Library Association. He lives in Fremantle, where he is working on another novel.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jasper Jones takes place in Australia in the late 1960s, shortly before the Apollo 11 moon landing (which occurred on July 20, 1969). At this time, the United States was involved in a lengthy, bloody conflict in Vietnam. In the Cold War between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union, the United States increased its military force to prevent communism from spreading to the developing countries of the world, such as Chile, Cuba, Indonesia, Iran, and Vietnam. To this end, it sent tens of thousands of its own citizens to fight in South Vietnam to prevent the region from falling under the control of Communist forces—the Vietcong—who were based out of North Vietnam and led by the charismatic Ho Chi Minh. Because Australia was an ally of the United States, it sent many tens of thousands of its own troops to fight in Vietnam, and many of them died in horrific ways. Because Australia had a significant Asian immigrant population at the time, Asian residents of Australia often had to endure harassment, bullying, and outright violence from Australians who resented that their friends and loved ones were being sent to fight the Vietnamese. In Silvey's novel, Jeffrey Lu and his family are the victims of violence and bullying from residents of Corrigan who have family members fighting in Vietnam.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Jasper Jones explicitly references dozens of novels, nearly all of them written by American authors after World War II. Charlie Bucktin's favorite book is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. Like Lee's novel, *Jasper Jones* deals with themes of racism, scapegoating, and compassion in the framework of a coming-of-age story. In interviews, Silvey has expressed his admiration for the American novelists who wrote in the "Southern Gothic" style, such as Flannery O'Conner, Truman Capote, William Faulkner, and Harper Lee. The Southern Gothic novel often involves a mysterious individual with a shadowy past (such as Boo Radley) whom the main character must come to understand. In *Jasper Jones*, this mysterious individual is Mad Jack Lionel—a troubled old man whose life story is crucial to understanding the main characters.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Jasper Jones
- **Where Written:** Fremantle, Australia
- **When Published:** 3 Oct, 2009
- **Literary Period:** The young adult "boom"
- **Genre:** Gothic, young adult, *Bildungsroman*
- **Setting:** Corrigan, Australia
- **Climax:** Charlie discovers how Laura Wishart died.
- **Antagonist:** Pete Wishart / Warwick Trent / the racist townspeople
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Rock star: Silvey may have carved out a place for himself in the literary world, but he's arguably best known as the lead singer and songwriter for the Australian indie band *The Nancy Sikes*. Even the name of Silvey's band betrays his literary predilections—Nancy Sikes is a character from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens.

Readers of all ages: It's hard to classify *Jasper Jones*'s target audience—while it's about children, and has a charmingly mysterious tone, it's full of dark, disturbing events that aren't exactly suitable for young readers. Silvey is no stranger to writing books for young readers, though—his second book, *The World According to Warren*, is a picture book about a dog.

PLOT SUMMARY

Jasper Jones takes place in a small town in Australia in the late 1960s. A boy named Charlie Bucktin is reading in his room late at night, when another boy, Jasper Jones, knocks at his window and tells him to come out. Jasper begs Charlie to come with him, and because of his respect for Jasper, Charlie obliges.

As Jasper leads Charlie through the town where they live,

Corrigan, Charlie thinks about what he knows about Jasper. Jasper is "half-caste," meaning that one of his parents is white, while the other is Aboriginal. Because of his mixed race, he is blamed for every misfortune or crime in Corrigan. His father is a lazy drunk, and Jasper has long been forced to take care of himself.

Jasper leads Charlie past the river and into a clearing in the bushes. It is here that Jasper lives and sleeps. Jasper shows Charlie what he has discovered: the body of a young girl, hanging by a rope from a tree. Jasper explains that the girl is Laura Wishart, a girlfriend of his. Jasper claims that he found Laura hanging there earlier in the night, and went to Charlie for help because he believes that Charlie is wise, trustworthy, and loyal. Charlie, horrified by the sight of a dead body, tells Jasper that they need to alert the police, but Jasper insists that if they do so, Jasper will be arrested for the crime and sent to jail. Jasper convinces Charlie to hide Laura's body by throwing it in the nearby river. He and Charlie must try to find the real killer—only in this way can Jasper clear his own name. Jasper suggests that the real killer is Mad Jack Lionel, a mysterious, reclusive old man who supposedly killed a young woman years ago. It's a traditional feat of bravery in Corrigan to sneak onto Mad Jack's land and steal **peaches** from his tree.

The next day, Charlie spends time with his parents, Wesley Bucktin and Ruth Bucktin. Charlie greatly admires his father, who shares his love for writing. Charlie believes that Wesley is secretly working on a novel in his library, and wishes that Wesley would talk to him about it. Charlie dislikes his mother, whom he finds controlling and petty. Years ago, she nearly died giving birth to Charlie's younger sister, who died shortly thereafter. Ruth, who comes from a wealthy family in a large city, hates her life in Corrigan, a fact that everyone but Wesley notices.

Charlie's best friend is Jeffrey Lu, an intelligent, humorous Vietnamese boy. Because Corrigan has sent many soldiers to fight in the Vietnam War, Jeffrey must cope with the racism of the townspeople. In spite of his superior cricketing abilities, Jeffrey is forbidden from playing on the town cricket team by Warwick Trent, a bully who constantly threatens both Jeffrey and Charlie. We also see that Charlie is terrified of insects, and has a crush on Laura's beautiful, intelligent sister, Eliza Wishart. Whenever he sees Eliza, Charlie has a strong urge to tell her what he knows about Laura. Nevertheless, Charlie keeps quiet, remembering that he's promised Jasper his help and loyalty.

Charlie researches other murders that have occurred near Corrigan, and uncovers some gruesome information about serial killers. He finds it difficult to understand why people kill and hurt others, though he considers the possibility that they do so because they were bullied and marginalized themselves.

When he comes home from the library, Charlie is surprised to find that his parents, especially Ruth, are furious with him for leaving the house without telling them—there is a search party looking for Laura, and the neighborhood is keeping a close watch on all children. Ruth forces Charlie to dig a hole and then fill it in, a process that takes hours. Charlie despises his mother for punishing him in this way, but Wesley encourages him to deal with her diplomatically and politely.

Jeffrey Lu and his family face harassment from the townspeople. A woman named Sue Findlay yells at Mrs. Lu and pours hot water on her body because she blames Mrs. Lu for her husband's death in Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, Charlie sneaks out of his house at night to reunite with Jasper Jones in the glade. He learns that Jasper has been arrested and beaten up by the local police. Jasper tells Charlie that he plans to sneak onto Jack Lionel's property to find evidence of his culpability in killing Laura. He also confesses to Charlie that he'd been out of the town in the days leading up to Laura's death—if he had been in Corrigan, then he could have met up with Laura in his glade and possibly have protected her. Charlie feels enormous sympathy for Jasper. He fantasizes about leaving Corrigan with Jasper, and driving through Australia like the protagonists of one of his favorite novels, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Before they leave the glade, Charlie makes an important discovery—someone has written the word "Sorry" on the tree where Laura was hanged.

When he returns to his house that night, Charlie learns that his parents have found him missing. He quickly makes up a story about going to visit Eliza, and to his great surprise, his parents, along with the police, accept Charlie's story as the truth. Afterwards, Charlie is grounded, and he spends the next two weeks reading and writing in his room. Charlie's misbehavior creates a distance between Ruth and Wesley—Ruth blames Wesley for turning Charlie against her.

At the end of Charlie's two weeks indoors, he goes to see Jeffrey play for the Corrigan cricket team. By a fluke, Jeffrey has been allowed to sub out for another player. During the match, Eliza sees Charlie, and sits next to him. Although Charlie feels very awkward around Eliza, he charms her, and she tells him that she finds him very sweet. They kiss, and Charlie feels happier than he's felt in weeks. Meanwhile, Jeffrey plays brilliantly, winning the cricket match for Corrigan. As a result, he wins the grudging respect of his cricket team, even Warwick Trent.

The night after the cricket match, a group of four men visits Jeffrey's house, where they destroy his father An Lu's prized garden. Charlie, who is the first to see the vandalism, screams for his father, who immediately runs outside and takes on all four of the men. Shortly thereafter he's joined by other neighbors, who beat up the vandals. Charlie is deeply inspired by his father's heroism.

On New Year's Eve, Charlie is planning to spend time with Eliza at the town's traditional fireworks show. Eliza hints that she has something important to tell Charlie. Before he can meet up with her, Charlie sees Jasper outside his window, insisting that

Charlie accompany him to Mad Jack Lionel's house. Jasper explains that he has searched Mad Jack's property, where he's seen an old car with the word "Sorry" scratched on it. He plans to go to Mad Jack's house, tell him what he knows, and force him to confess to killing Laura. Charlie reluctantly agrees to accompany Jasper, even though he's skeptical that Jasper's plan will work, or that Mad Jack killed Laura in the first place.

At Mad Jack's house, Charlie is amazed to see that Jack is a polite, lonely old man who isn't the least bit hostile to either Jasper or Charlie. Jasper angrily tells Jack that he knows Jack killed "her." Jack begins to cry, and confesses that he did so. When Jasper provides more details about Laura's death, Jack looks confused. Over the course of the next hour, Jack reveals the truth: Jack is Jasper's own grandfather. Years ago, Jasper's father, David Jones, married a beautiful Aboriginal woman named Rosie Jones. Jack didn't approve of the marriage because Rosie wasn't white. As a result, David shunned his father and changed his surname. After Rosie gave birth to Jasper, Jack changed his mind about Rosie, and indeed, became a close friend to her. One day, while Jack was alone with Rosie, Rosie had an attack of appendicitis. Jack tried to drive her to the nearest hospital, but got into a horrible car crash that killed Rosie. As a result, David never spoke to his father again, and never told Jasper about him. Jack tells Jasper that he wishes he had died in the crash instead of Rosie. He adds that he has always believed that Jasper was avoiding him because David had told Jasper about Rosie's death. Now, Jack realizes the truth: Jasper avoided him because he had no idea who Jack was.

Jasper and Charlie are stunned by Jack's explanation. They leave Jack's house in a daze, going their separate ways. As he's walking home, Charlie runs into Eliza, who tells him that she has crucial information. Eliza takes Charlie to Jasper's glade. Along the way, Charlie sees his mother with another man, and realizes that she's been having an affair. He angrily tells her that he'll never listen to her again.

In Jasper's glade, Eliza tells Charlie that she is responsible for Laura's death. Eliza claims that she followed Laura to Jasper's glade on the night Laura died. She silently watched as Laura sat and waiting for "someone" to arrive. Eventually, Laura climbed up a tree, tied a rope around her neck, and hanged herself. Eliza produces a letter that she claims to have found underneath Laura's hanging body.

Eliza reads Charlie the letter, which is addressed to Jasper Jones. In it, Laura explains that her father, Pete Wishart, had raped and abused her for years. The day she died, Laura discovered that her own father had impregnated her. She tried to tell her mother what he father had done, but amazingly, her mother didn't believe her. Afterwards, Laura's father went into her room and beat her savagely, warning her never to talk about his abusiveness again. Eliza heard screams from Laura's room, and then saw Laura running out of the house. She followed Laura to Jasper's glade, where she witnessed the suicide. A few nights later, haunted by her own guilt at having watched passively as her sister killed herself, Eliza returned to Jasper's glade and wrote "**sorry**" on the tree.

Charlie is traumatized by what Eliza tells him. Eliza asks him what he knows about Laura, and Charlie admits that he moved Laura's body with Jasper's help. Eliza is pained by this information, but she forgives Charlie. As they sit together in the glade, Jasper arrives, and demands to know what Eliza is doing there. Eliza explains everything she's previously told Charlie. As she does so, Jasper moans and screams, and then dives into a nearby waterhole. Charlie jumps after him, pulling him to the surface and embracing him. He realizes that Jasper's image of charisma and bravery is just a mask, disguising his fear, sadness, and loneliness. Jasper tells Eliza that he is responsible for Laura's death—if he'd been in Corrigan at the time, then he could have consoled Laura and convinced her to live. Eliza doesn't disagree with anything Jasper says. She suggests that they tell the police about Pete's crimes. Jasper and Charlie reject this suggestion. If they go to the authorities, they argue, then Jasper will once again be blamed for Laura's death, just as he's blaming himself now. Charlie comes to the frustrating conclusion that the best option is to keep the true circumstances of Laura's death a secret. He also notices that Eliza seems to blame Jasper for Laura's death, and wants to punish him appropriately.

As he thinks about Jasper, Charlie remembers a childish argument he's had with Jeffrey about the merits of **Batman and Superman**. Like Batman, he realizes, he has to embrace and accept his fears and limitations, rather than aspiring to be like Superman, who has neither fears nor limitations.

The next day, Eliza, Jasper, and Charlie go their separate ways. Charlie senses that he'll never see Jasper again—he's going to leave Corrigan for good. When Charlie returns, he finds his mother packing to leave Corrigan, too. She's told Wesley about her affair. Ruth never returns to Corrigan—she lives with her wealthy relatives, not speaking to either Wesley or Charlie. Wesley takes care of Charlie on his own, and finishes the novel he's been working on. Charlie is the first to read it, and he finds it beautiful and brilliant.

At the end of the novel, Charlie performs a feat of "bravery" that impresses the schoolchildren of Corrigan. He sneaks onto Mad Jack's property and steals peaches. To impress his peers even more, Charlie stages a "fight" with Jack, promising Jack that he'll make up the favor by making Jack dinner soon. Charlie walks off of Mad Jack's property, applauded and cheered by the schoolchildren. Even Warwick Trent acknowledges that Charlie has shown great bravery. Amused, Charlie thinks to himself that it took more bravery for him to pick up the peaches, which were crawling with bugs, than to sneak onto Jack's property.

Suddenly, someone sees a plume of smoke in the distance.

Charlie runs toward the smoke, and sees that Eliza's house is on fire. Her parents are alive, though her father is in an oxygen mask, with burns on his body. Charlie realizes that it was Eliza who burned the house, and realizes that he'll never fully understand her motives. He also recognizes that Jasper will be blamed for this act of arson, and forced to stay away from Corrigan for the rest of his life. This news saddens Charlie, but doesn't worry him—he knows that Jasper is too clever to be caught by the police. Charlie walks towards Eliza, who continues to look calmly at the fire, and whispers "the perfect words" in her ear.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Charlie Bucktin – The protagonist of the novel. Charlie is thirteen, almost fourteen years old, and lives in the small town of Corrigan, Australia. For much of the book, he struggles with various fears and insecurities: fear of insects, of bullies, of failure, etc. Charlie is an avid reader of American authors (including Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, and Truman Capote) and a budding writer who dreams of living in New York as an adult. Over the course of the novel, Charlie matures considerably. He learns to master his anger, behaving diplomatically around his parents and his friends. He also realizes that he will never be entirely free of his fears, but that he can train himself to face them. Charlie struggles to understand other people's motives for committing crimes, though as the novel concludes, we are left to guess what conclusions on this subject Charlie has reached.

Jasper Jones – Jasper Jones is a half-white, half-Aboriginal fourteen-year-old who enlists Charlie's help in hiding Laura Wishart's dead body, thereby setting off the events that make up the novel's plot. Because he is "mixed caste," and is raised by a neglectful father, Jasper is a scapegoat for every crime and wrongdoing in the town of Corrigan. Like Charlie, he frequently contemplates leaving Corrigan. Charlie is fascinated with Jasper's courage and calmness throughout the novel, though in the end, he comes to realize that Jasper is no more mature or brave than Charlie himself. Charlie also comes to see that Jasper is capable of great love, loyalty, and sympathy for others.

Mad Jack Lionel – A legendary resident of Corrigan who supposedly killed a woman years ago, Mad Jack Lionel is greatly feared by the adolescents and children of the town. Indeed, it's a common test of courage to steal peach pits from the tree on his property. Toward the end of the novel, Charlie and Jasper discover that Jack is Jasper's paternal grandfather. Jasper's father, David, resented Jack for refusing to accept Rosie, his wife, for being Aboriginal. Later, Jack accidentally caused Rosie's death by driving her to a hospital and getting into a bad car crash. As a result, David never tells Jasper that Jack is his grandfather. Charlie comes to see Jack as a sad, lonely man, worthy of his sympathy and compassion.

Wesley Bucktin – Charlie's father and Ruth's husband, Wesley Bucktin is an immensely calm, patient, and intelligent man who loves Charlie enormously. Ruth's family resents Wesley for eloping with Ruth, and at the time when the book begins, Ruth has begun to hate Wesley for moving to a small, dull town. Though Wesley is usually honest and frank with Charlie, Charlie notices that he keeps secrets from him as well: for instance, he is secretly working on a novel. Though he respects his father enormously, Charlie dislikes that he hides his true beliefs and convictions, usually at Ruth's urgings.

Ruth Bucktin – Charlie's mother and Wesley's wife. Ruth is an angry, cold woman who hates her life in Corrigan, and often wishes she were living with her wealthy family, far from Charlie and Wesley. Ruth is more concerned with the appearance of normality than with either Wesley or Charlie as people, and she puts enormous effort into seeming as decent and well-to-do as possible to the other townspeople. Charlie resents Ruth for her strict behavior, though Wesley teaches him to act diplomatically around her. By the end of the novel, Charlie has learned that Ruth is unfaithful to Wesley—and when he learns this, he tells her that he'll never listen to her again.

Eliza Wishart – A beautiful girl in Charlie's grade, and the sister of Laura Wishart. Eliza Wishart is the object of Charlie's desire throughout the novel. She is intelligent, poised, and witty. Charlie often struggles to say witty things around her. He is elated when he discovers that Eliza is attracted to him. For most of the novel, Charlie senses that Eliza is carrying a secret about Laura's disappearance, though it's not until the end that he learns what this secret is. Ultimately, Eliza represents a puzzle for Charlie. Despite her appearance of calmness and composure, she is capable of acts of enormous destruction, which lie outside Charlie's full comprehension.

Jeffrey Lu – Charlie's close friend, Jeffrey Lu is a twelve-year-old Vietnamese boy who is in the same grade as Charlie and Eliza, having been skipped forward one year. Jeffrey has an absurd, frequently vulgar sense of humor, and for long stretches of the novel he peppers Charlie with strange questions and insults, which Charlie returns. Jeffrey is an enormously optimistic person and a superb cricket player. Ultimately, his determination and optimism win him the grudging respect of the Corrigan townspeople. At the same time, Jeffrey deals with racism and discrimination from the townspeople, because his family is Vietnamese (the novel takes place at the height of the Vietnam War.)

Laura Wishart – Eliza's sister, Laura Wishart is a thoughtful, intelligent girl, but her death by hanging is the event that begins the novel. Prior to her mysterious death, Laura had been in a relationship with Jasper Jones, and they had talked about leaving Corrigan and living together one day. Jasper describes Laura as wise and peaceful, two qualities that Charlie also

notices in Laura's sister, Eliza. Over the course of the book, Charlie discovers that Laura's father, Pete Wishart, raped and abused her.

Warwick Trent – A school bully who beats up Charlie for his intelligence and bookishness, Warwick Trent is a member of the Corrigan cricket team, and thus the cause of much grief for Jeffrey Lu. After Charlie and Jeffrey prove their courage and athleticism, Warwick is forced to give them his grudging respect.

Pete Wishart – Laura and Eliza's father. Pete Wishart is an alcoholic, abusive man who nonetheless serves as the president of the shire (county) that contains the town of Corrigan. Wishart is skilled at hiding his cruelty and abusiveness from others, even after he rapes and impregnates his own daughter. By the end of the novel, Pete's crimes remain unknown to the public, though Eliza has taken her own revenge on him.

David Jones – Jasper Jones's father and Jack Lionel's son, David Jones was a champion football player as a young man. He fell in love with Rosie, a beautiful Aborigine woman, but though he married Rosie and had a child with her, his father refused to acknowledge her for racial reasons. David and his father then had a falling out. When, later, Jack eventually befriended Rosie, and then accidentally caused her death, David stopped speaking to Jack, and never told Jasper that Jack was his grandfather. In the second half of his life, David fell into alcoholism and grief, and took poor care of Jasper.

Rosie Jones – A beautiful Aborigine woman who marries David Jones and gives birth to Jasper Jones. Rosie later befriends David's father, Jack Lionel, despite the fact that he'd originally refused to acknowledge her after her marriage to her son. Rosie dies in a car crash, and Jack, who was driving the car, blames himself for her death.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Doug Walters – Jeffrey Lu's favorite cricket player.

Mrs. Lu – Jeffrey Lu's kind, loving mother. Mrs. Lu endures racism and bullying from the townspeople of Corrigan throughout the novel.

Jacob Irving – A member of the Corrigan cricket team.

An Lu – Jeffrey's father, and a devoted gardener, whose front garden is a Corrigan landmark.

Mrs. Sparkman – A neighbor of the Lus and the Bucktins.

Mrs. Harvey – Corrigan's librarian.

Sylvia Likens – A 16-year-old girl who was starved, tortured, and killed by Gertrude Baniszewski years before the events of the novel. Sylvia's death makes Charlie wonder how ordinary people can be so cruel and callous.

Jenny Likens – Sylvia Likens's younger sister, who brought the authorities' attention to her sister's mistreatment too late to save her life.

Gertrude Baniszewski – A cruel woman who tortures and eventually murders Sylvia Likens.

Eric Edgar Cooke – A quiet, harelipped man who murders five women years before the events of the novel. Cooke's insistence that he "wanted to hurt someone" causes Charlie great confusion.

Mrs. Wishart – Laura and Eliza's mother, and Pete Wishart's husband. Mrs. Wishart stubbornly refuses to believe that her husband is a rapist, even when Laura tells her so. Her indifference indirectly causes Laura's death by suicide.

Prue Styles – A lonely girl with a birthmark who lives in Corrigan.

Sam Quinn – A boy with a cleft palate who lives in Corrigan.

Sue Findlay – A rude, racist woman who scalds Mrs. Lu's skin and verbally abuses her after her husband, Ray, is killed in Vietnam.

Ray Findlay – Sue Findlay's husband, who was killed in the Vietnam War.

Atticus Finch – A character from Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of Charlie's favorite books. Atticus is a symbol of thoughtfulness and righteousness for Charlie. At many points, Charlie wonders what Atticus would do in his position.

Keith Tostling – A local sheep shearer.

Jim Quincy – A member of the Corrigan cricket team.

James Trent – One of the men who attack An Lu and ruin his lawn. It's implied that James is Warwick's father.

Roy Sparkman – A neighbor of the Bucktins and the Lus, who helps defend An Lu when a group of racists attacks him.

Maggie Sparkman – Roy Sparkman's wife.

Mick Thompson – One of the men who attack An Lu and ruin his garden.

Harry Rawlings – A neighbor of the Bucktins and the Lus, who helps defend An Lu when a group of racists attacks him.

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.

FEAR

Charlie Bucktin, the protagonist of *Jasper Jones*, spends most of the novel in a state of fear. He's afraid that Eliza Wishart, his crush, will think he's

awkward, he's terrified of insects, and he's frightened by bullies like Warwick Trent. The event that begins the novel—Charlie's discovery of Laura Wishart's dead body hanging from a tree—is so frightening and bizarre that it traumatizes Charlie for the remainder of the book, to the point that he can barely move. This behavior contrasts markedly—or at least seems to—with the calm, effortless heroism of Jasper Jones, the homeless half-Aboriginal boy who befriends Charlie.

Charlie wishes that he could overcome his fears, but he finds it enormously difficult to do so. He also sees adults in his community being paralyzed by their own fears. When racists, angry about news from the Vietnam War, bully the Vietnamese Lu family, for instance, no one steps forward to help them. In part, this is because many of the townspeople are racist as well, but their lack of response also suggests that no one is brave enough to defend the Lus out of fear of being bullied and shunned themselves. Charlie also learns that even those who seem fearless are not usually as brave as they seem—Jasper Jones is no more comfortable dealing with Laura's death than Charlie is.

Over the course of the book, however, Charlie learns strategies for dealing with his fears. Arguably his most important insight is that one can never escape one's fears entirely, but must simply live with them. Charlie explains this with an amusing analogy: Batman is the best superhero because he has no superpowers. In other words, he is a mortal, capable of being injured and even killed. Because of this, Batman has to learn to accept his fears and weaknesses, overcoming them to protect other people. In much the same way, Charlie accepts that he'll always be afraid of the things that frighten him—insects, Laura's body, etc.—but he also realizes that his fear *allows* him to be brave. It gives him the opportunity for feats of bravery.

Charlie sees other members of his community overcoming their own fears as well. His father, Wesley Bucktin, defends An Lu from a group of racist bullies even though no one else will. Charlie also discovers that fear can be fought with knowledge and understanding. His lifelong fear of Mad Jack Lionel, for instance, evaporates when he visits Jack, speaks to him, and learns that he's a lonely, harmless old man. In all, Charlie realizes that while it's impossible to get rid of one's fears altogether, there are ways of minimizing and overcoming fear. By recognizing that all people feel fear, and that ordinary people are capable of heroism, Charlie trains himself be courageous—to act quickly and intelligently instead of being paralyzed with insecurity.

RACISM AND SCAPEGOATING

Jasper Jones is set in 1960s Australia, where non-white people are often the targets of bullying and cruelty. Because he is half-Aboriginal, Jasper Jones is routinely blamed for other people's crimes and indiscretions. The townspeople of Corrigan also bully and even attack the Lu family. The novel takes place during the Vietnam War, when Australia sent many troops to fight against the Vietcong. As a result, racism against the Vietnamese was very high, and the Lus are victims of it. The author, Craig Silvey, makes it clear that there are many whites (like Wesley) who are willing to fight racism, but overall, Corrigan is a profoundly racist community in which all kinds of discrimination and race-based harassment are tolerated.

While minorities obviously should not have to "prove" their worth to white communities, Silvey does show that whites can overcome their own racism by respecting and admiring others for their actions. Jasper earns a grudging respect from his community by playing football, and Jeffrey Lu, Charlie's Vietnamese best friend, wins over his cricket team, which had previously called him "Cong," with a superb performance in a cricket match. This kind of respect is a fragile thing, however, and rarely a real mitigation of racism—if someone is considered valuable only when they do something outstanding, then they are not really considered inherently valuable as a human being. Thus, Jasper Jones never stops being the town scapegoat, and Jeffrey's father, An Lu, is beaten only a few hours after Jeffrey's cricket performance.

Ultimately, Silvey suggests that racism arises from ignorance, and people must make an effort to be understanding and empathetic in order to overcome their own prejudices. For example, Jeffrey's likability, his intelligence, and his athleticism are drowned out by Corrigan's assumptions about Vietnam and the Vietnamese, while someone like Charlie, who lacks such assumptions, can see those qualities and consider Jeffrey a valuable person and friend. In the end, it is this process of friendship and understanding—like Charlie's friendships with Jeffrey and Jasper—that is the most successful way of combating racism.

UNDERSTANDING, INNOCENCE, AND SYMPATHY

As Charlie is exposed to murder, racism, and other crimes, he struggles to understand the wrongdoers' motives, with mixed success. Traumatized and deeply confused by the sight Laura's dead body, Charlie goes to the library to research the other crimes that have taken place in his town. There, he discovers a string of grisly murders. In one case, the murderer was a lonely man named Cooke who had been bullied for most of his life. In another, the murderer killed a teenaged girl, and enlisted the help of other children to do so. Charlie's research suggests many complicated and disturbing questions: How can it be that seemingly normal people are capable of heinous crimes? Should murderers be treated with more sympathy because they've experienced cruelty and bullying of their own? Can people ever truly apologize for their crimes?

At the core of Charlie's conflict is his desire to understand and sympathize with people unlike himself. While he is not always willing to sympathize with criminals, his instinct is always to learn more, in an effort to understand others' motives. One sees this same instinct in the way Charlie thinks about Jasper Jones. He tries to see the world from Jasper's point of view—as Atticus Finch, the hero of Charlie's favorite book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, would put it, he tries "climb into his skin and walk around in it."

Sometimes, Charlie's efforts to understand others are successful. When he and Jasper go to confront "Mad" Jack Lionel, they learn that Jack accidentally killed Rosie Jones, a woman Jack loved dearly, and that Jack is now just a lonely and harmless old man. Here Charlie's desire to learn more results in his sympathy for a person he'd previously regarded as a dangerous criminal. At other times, however, it's unclear how deeply Charlie understands others' motives for wrongdoing. At the end of the novel, for instance, Charlie is unable to relate to Eliza's crime, however justified it might be—tormented by her guilt and hatred for her abusive father, she sets fire to her own house, with her father still inside it.

Ultimately, Charlie acknowledges that there are some actions he'll never understand. Cooke's murders, like Eliza's arson, are foreign to him, because he simply *can't* "walk around" in Cooke's skin and see things from his point of view. This helps to explain why Silvey's book is named after Jasper Jones, rather than Charlie Bucktin or Eliza Wishart (characters who are just as important to the plot of the novel). Jasper is a friend to Charlie, but he's also a mystery—the racism and neglect that Jasper experiences every day are utterly foreign to Charlie. Charlie must learn how to empathize with other people—Jasper included—while also admitting that there are certain aspects of people's lives and personalities that he'll never understand.

As the novel ends, it seems that this realization helps Charlie reach some kind of conclusion about how to relate to wrongdoers like Cooke and Eliza. Charlie bends toward Eliza's ear and whispers "the perfect words." Silvey never tells us what these words are. Perhaps this is his way of suggesting that there is no "correct" answer to the questions Charlie has posed in the novel. Each reader must decide for himself how to judge Eliza, Cooke, and those who commit crimes in general.

APPEARANCES AND SECRETS

Corrigan, the small town in which *Jasper Jones* is set, is obsessed with appearances. The white townspeople judge non-white people like Jasper Jones and Jeffrey Lu based entirely on their appearances, and their racist preconceptions about how Asian or "half-caste" people should behave. More generally, the townspeople talk constantly about people's appearances. Any hint of impropriety or oddness is immediately the subject of gossip.

Because Corrigan places so much stock in gossip and appearances, all the townspeople "protect" themselves by keeping secrets in order to hide any evidence that might make them seem different or expose them to the ridicule or condemnation from the larger community. In the Bucktin family alone, Wesley Bucktin secretly writes a novel, while Charlie conceals his own literary projects from his father and others. Much more seriously, Charlie's mother Ruth Bucktin is also involved in a secret affair with another man.

At the beginning of the novel, Charlie despises secrets and Corrigan's emphasis on appearances. Though he loves his father, he wishes his father would tell him about the novel he's writing. Working with his friend Jasper Jones, Charlie wants to find whoever killed Laura and bring them to justice. In this way, Charlie will expose the secret of Laura's disappearance, and exonerate Jasper of all guilt—for as Jasper has previously pointed out, unless they can find the real killer, everyone will blame Jasper for the crime, again judging him on his appearance of untrustworthiness. Charlie hates that he has to keep his knowledge of Laura's disappearance a secret. Dozens of times, he wishes he could tell Eliza or Wesley what he knows. Because he can't share his secret, he feels a tremendous sense of anxiety.

When Jasper and Charlie learn more about Laura and her death, it becomes clearer and clearer that the truth will not automatically clear Jasper from all culpability. Because Laura hanged herself after looking for Jasper and failing to find him, the townspeople *will* blame Jasper for Laura's death. It is for this reason that Eliza, Charlie, and Jasper decide to keep the circumstances of Laura's death—including the rape and abuse she endured from her father—a secret.

The ultimate tragedy of *Jasper Jones* is that the truth doesn't always triumph. Because the world is a complicated, imperfect place, secrets need to be kept and information needs to be withheld to give the appearance of normality. This "compromise" on truth can have dire results. Although Eliza agrees to keep her knowledge of her father to herself, she cannot stand to let him get away with raping his own daughter. Thus, she burns down her house with her father inside.

ESCAPE, GUILT, AND WRITING

One of the first pieces of information we learn about Charlie Bucktin is that he loves reading and writing. At many points throughout the novel, he uses literature as a form of fantasy, through which he can momentarily escape from his feelings of guilt and anxiety.

After Charlie's discovery of Laura's body, he is profoundly traumatized, and it's only by fantasizing about the day when he can move to New York and be a great writer that Charlie copes with his trauma. Other characters in the novel have their own fantasies of escape, too: Jasper longs to leave Corrigan and go

north; Ruth wants to return to her wealthy lifestyle in the city; and Eliza dreams of living like Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Although Silvey acknowledges that fantasy and escapism are important tools by which humans cope with sadness, literal escape is never an ideal option for the characters in his book. Jasper "escapes" Corrigan at the end of the novel, but only because he's suspected of murder and arson, so there's nothing celebratory about the circumstances of his exit. The only character who leaves Corrigan willingly is Ruth Bucktin, who returns to her family after Charlie discovers that his mother is having an affair. Silvey portrays Ruth as childish and spoiled. Her escape to the city, then, is an admission of weakness and cowardice, proof that she can't deal with her problems in Corrigan in a mature manner.

It is precisely because escape itself is always less than ideal that *fantasies* of escape are so important to the characters in the novel. The most important form that fantasy takes is fiction writing. For Charlie, fiction is a way to ease the pain and sorrow he experiences in his life. After he learns that Laura's father raped her, for instance, he uses writing as a form of therapy, explaining that he needs to "get it out" as quickly as possible. It's possible to read all of *Jasper Jones* as a way for Charlie to cope with the events he's experienced. Forced to keep Laura's death a secret, Charlie had to deal with anxiety, guilt, and fear. By writing about Laura's death (in other words, writing the book we're reading), he eases his burden, passing on some of his feelings to the reader. Other characters, like Jasper and Eliza, feel similar feelings of guilt and anxiety—indeed, they both blame themselves for Laura's death. Yet neither Jasper nor Eliza uses writing to overcome guilt. Instead, Jasper flees Corrigan, and Eliza resorts to arson and attempted murder of her father to enact justice for Laura's death.

In general, then, the book *Jasper Jones* itself is a key part of Charlie's coming of age. Instead of running away like Jasper or Ruth, or turning to violence, like Eliza, he stays in Corrigan, dealing with his problems more maturely and intelligently by writing about them. For Silvey, writing is a part of growing up. Rather than avoiding one's problems by retreating into make-believe, or fleeing one's problem altogether, the writer can confront his problems head-on, interpreting them and dramatizing them. While this doesn't make one's problems disappear altogether, it does prevent them from "building up," as they do for Eliza.

SYMBOLS

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

BATMAN VERSUS SUPERMAN

At several points in *Jasper Jones*, Charlie Bucktin tries to convince Jeffrey Lu that Batman is superior to Superman. He argues that although Superman is stronger, faster, and generally invincible, Batman's lack of superpowers actually makes him more, not less impressive. Because Batman is mortal, he requires tremendous bravery and drive to continue fighting crime—Superman's adventures, on the other hand, have no stakes, since he's always stronger than his opponents. Silvey makes the symbolism of this exchange very clear. Charlie's fears and insecurities, like Batman's, don't disqualify him from acts of heroism—on the contrary, they make these acts even more impressive. By the end of the book, Charlie has concluded that he shouldn't try to eliminate his fears, but instead he should learn to accept them and live with them, recognizing that they're a crucial part of his character.

PEACHES

At the beginning and the end of the novel, Silvey mentions a traditional "dare" for the children of Corrigan: to sneak onto Mad Jack Lionel's property and steal a peach from the peach tree that grows in his yard. Because this dare shows up at both the beginning and the end of the book, it serves as a convenient gauge of Charlie's maturation. At first, Charlie fears Mad Jack, and wouldn't dare sneak onto his land. Over the course of the plot, though, he learns that Jack shouldn't feared at all—he's a sad, lonely old man who would never hurt the children who steal from him. This discovery teaches Charlie the valuable lesson that fear is often the byproduct of ignorance and outright foolishness, the antidote to which is knowledge and understanding. Yet when he walks onto Mad Jack's property to steal peaches at the end of the book, Charlie must still face his fear of insects. Looking down at the peaches lying on the ground, Charlie sees that they're crawling with bees and ants, both of which frighten him. Thus, it takes bravery for Charlie to pick up the peaches at all—ironically, he notes, this is the bravest thing he does while on Mad Jack's land, even though the other schoolchildren think his bravery consists of sneaking onto the property at all. Silvey's point is clear: sometimes, people can overcome their fears with knowledge and education, but there is a limit to how successful this approach can be. Some fears can never be eliminated. Nevertheless, people can train themselves to face their fears, maturing in the process.

"SORRY"

Jasper discovers the word "sorry" written in two different places: on the tree where Laura died, and on the side of a car on Mad Jack Lionel's property. Jasper believes that this proves that Jack is responsible for Laura's

death, but in the end, he realizes that the repetition of the words is only a coincidence. Jack wrote "sorry" on the car because he blames himself for killing Rosie Jones, Jasper's own mother. Eliza, not Jack, wrote "sorry" on the tree, because she blames herself for Laura's death. Charlie often wonders what "sorry" accomplishes. On one hand, verbal apologies communicate sympathy and regret from the guilty party to the offended party. Yet there is something shallow and unsatisfying about apologies of this kind, he acknowledges. "Sorry" can never entirely repair the damage caused by a crime. Ultimately, the word "sorry" symbolizes the inadequacy of remorse and redemption in the novel. Characters try to forget and atone for their crimes, but their efforts are never entirely successful. What's done is done, and no amount of apologies or tears can change this.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ember edition of *Jasper Jones* published in 2012.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Jasper Jones has a terrible reputation in Corrigan. He's a Thief, a Liar, a Thug, a Truant. He's lazy and unreliable. He's feral and an orphan, or as good as. His mother is dead and his father is no good. He's the rotten model that parents hold aloft as a warning: *This is how you'll end up if you're disobedient.* Jasper Jones is the example of where poor aptitude and attitude will lead.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Jasper Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Early on in the novel, Charlie, the young narrator, introduces us to Jasper Jones. Here, Charlie doesn't tell us what *he* thinks of Jasper--instead, he tells us what the people in his community think of Jasper. Apparently, they regard Jasper as bad in almost every way--he's untrustworthy, criminal, no-good, etc.

One of the most important things to notice about this passage is the way the people of the community talk about "ending up" like Jasper--as if Jasper is a mature man, at or near the end of his life. Nobody seems to recognize that Jasper is still very young--he's still a teenager, after all. The unsympathetic townspeople don't treat Jasper as a child of any kind--as far as they're concerned, he's responsible for his own ruin--thus, it makes a certain amount of sense that they'd think of him as an adult instead of a youth. In general, the townspeople treat Jasper as a scapegoat, not a human being. Instead of extending love and compassion to Jasper, they blame him for everything bad that happens, and measure their own "goodness" against his badness.

"Bloody hell. Listen, Charlie, we can't tell anyone. No way. Specially the police. Because they are gonna say it was me. Straight up. Understand?"

Related Characters: Jasper Jones (speaker), Charlie Bucktin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Jasper and Charlie find a dead body, belonging to Laura Wishart, Jasper's former girlfriend. Jasper immediately tells Charlie that their only option is to lie--they can't report the death to the police for fear that Jasper will be arrested for the crime.

Jasper lives with the assumption that any problem will be pinned on him, and so he's apparently terrified that he'll be automatically arrested for this murder. And there is, of course, a legitimate possibility that the police will blame Jasper, simply because he's a known troublemaker--and a person of color, too. As Charlie has already verified, the people of the community despise Jasper, primarily because he's seen as "other" because of his Aboriginal mother.

At the same time, Charlie can't dismiss the possibility that Jasper really is guilty. A part of him wants to believe the racist townspeople--he wants to think that Jasper is dangerous and untrustworthy (and just because racists hate Jasper doesn't necessarily mean he's *not* a murderer). At this early point in the novel, Charlie doesn't know what to do--he just knows that he's overwhelmed and afraid.

I am dizzy and sick. And it's as though touching her has sealed my fate. I am in this story. She can't be ignored. She's real. I've touched her now. I've been privy to her last moments of heat, her last wisps of smoke.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Laura Wishart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charlie describes his experience touching the dead body of Laura Wishart, which Jasper has discovered in the woods. At first, Charlie feels like he's in a dream--everything he says and does seems vague and foggy. But when Charlie helps Jasper throw Laura's body in the river, he can no longer pretend that he's living in a dream--touching Laura's corpse brings home the reality of the situation in the most unforgettable way.

The passage shows Charlie as both an actor and an observer. Charlie's a peculiar character: his primary "job" is to witness and write about the other characters' actions (even his own book is named after someone else), and yet Charlie also gets involved in these characters' actions. Charlie tries to remain an impartial third party, but almost right away, he becomes personally invested in Laura's disappearance.

Chapter 2 Quotes

I wish I could tell Jeffrey everything. I really do. I wonder what it is about holding in a secret that hurts so much. I mean, telling Jeffrey doesn't change anything, it doesn't take anything back. It's just information. It doesn't dredge that poor girl from the depths of the dam, doesn't breathe her back to life. So why do I feel like I need to blurt it all out?

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Laura Wishart, Jeffrey Lu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie--who's now an accomplice to Jasper, having hidden a dead body at the bottom of a lake--contemplates spilling his secrets to his best friend Jeffrey Lu. Although Charlie and Jeffrey are close friends, Charlie knows that he can't share his secret with anyone--he swore an oath to Jasper to keep silent about the previous night.

Charlie's behavior during this scene suggests a strong need to tell *someone* about his traumatic experiences with Laura's dead body. By telling someone about his trauma, Charlie hopes to lessen the burden of remembering Laura.

In a sense, Charlie is trying to lessen the burden by writing the book we're reading. In other words, *Jasper Johns* represents Charlie's attempt make sense of his frightening, complex experiences.

He doesn't *need* superpowers. That's my point. You're an idiot. He can hold his own. He has an alter ego. He has a costume. He fights for Truth and Justice. He has arch enemies. And he does all this without any weird mutations. He's just really determined. That's what makes him interesting. The fact that with enough dedication and desire, we could all be Batman. Bat*men*. Bat*people*. And that's what makes him the best.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Jeffrey Lu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Charlie and Jeffrey have a strange, trivial-sounding conversation about the differences between Batman and Superman—a conversation that ends up being more thematically important than it seemed at first. Jeffrey argues that Superman is the superior hero: he's stronger than Batman, faster, can fly, etc. Charlie makes the interesting argument that while Batman is physically weaker than Superman, and has no superpowers, his humanity makes him the braver, more heroic person. Superman has very little to fear—he knows he's essentially invincible. Batman, on the other hand, faces his fear every day. He's learned to embrace fear and move past it—a kind of heroism Charlie admires more than brute strength or speed.

Charlie's argument reinforces one of the key themes of the book—overcoming one's fear. Charlie deals with a series of frightening and intimidating situations. Gradually, he comes to accept that bravery isn't the opposite of fear at all: true bravery involves first facing fear, then summoning the willpower to continue on.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ How was it that Gertrude Baniszewski could seduce so many children into committing these acts? How could they turn up, day after day, to do the unspeakable? And how could they return home of an evening, no words of shame or remorse tumbling out of their mouths? What did Sylvia Likens do to deserve this? Or was it just shit luck and chance?

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Gertrude Baniszewski, Sylvia Likens

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie becomes increasingly involved in Laura Wishart's disappearance (first lying about it, then actually helping Jasper get rid of her body), he starts to wonder what could lead a human being to hurt a child. Being a bookish, nerdy teenager in a pre-Internet age, Charlie goes to the library and does some research on the subject. During the course of his research, he comes across a woman named Gertrude Baniszewski, who tortured and murdered a child (Sylvia Likens) for no discernible reason, and enlisted her own children to help her. Appalled by what he reads, Charlie tries to grasp what could have led Gertrude to act the way she did.

In the first place, it's important to notice that Charlie is trying to understand Gertrude. While most of the people in Charlie's community don't offer any sympathy for the criminals, or people they perceive to be criminals (like Jasper), Charlie genuinely wants to understand people who are unlike him. This certainly doesn't mean that Charlie wants to forgive Gertrude for her actions—but he's too intelligent and open-minded to accept that Gertrude is purely "evil" and normal people are "good." Indeed, the facts of Gertrude's case practically prove that there are no normal people: Gertrude was able to convince other children to hurt her victim—innocent, everyday people were capable of committing astounding acts of cruelty, and other "normal" people ignored the crimes until it was too late. Charlie's investigation may shed some light on the actions of his neighbors—average Australian people who nonetheless greet Vietnamese immigrants with violence and bullying.

❝ I think about Eliza's manner. So dry and centered. So matter-of-fact amid the panic. I watch her climbing the garden steps to their front door, holding her weeping mother. Someone is there to meet them with an outstretched hand and a look of concern. I shrink behind the branches. And then, swift as a knife, it occurs to me. A rash of sparks coats my skin. My heart almost leaps from my chest, and my brick slides.

Eliza Wishart knows something.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Mrs. Wishart, Eliza Wishart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Charlie thinks about Eliza Wishart. Eliza is the sister of Laura—the young woman whose body Jasper and Charlie found at the beginning of the novel. Charlie has a massive crush on Eliza, and wants to tell her all that he knows about Eliza's sister. He struggles to withhold his secret from Eliza, remembering the promise he made Jasper to say nothing. As Charlie thinks about keeping his secret from Eliza, he comes to the surprising realization that Eliza is also keeping secrets from *him*. Her calm, complacent manner parallels Charlie's own—both teenagers are concealing a big, terrible secret.

The fact that Charlie and Eliza have so much in common—they both seem to be wracked by a guilty conscience—foreshadows the romance that will arise between them. More to the point, though, the passage suggests Charlie's struggle to understand people who are—he believes—unlike him. Eliza Wishart seems completely different from Charlie in every way—she's pretty, popular, well-spoken, etc. Thus, it's a surprise for Charlie when he comes to realize, here, that he and Eliza aren't so different after all.

❝ It's occurred to me that one day she might not come back at all. She might simply refuse. I know her family pressure her. I know they coddle her with self-serving concern, that they constantly remind her of the things she's missing, the things they feel she deserves. And I don't really blame her for being seduced by it. It's what she grew up with, I guess.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Ruth Bucktin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie doesn't get along well with his mother, Ruth. Ruth is strict, spoiled, and not particularly loving. In this scene, Ruth punishes Charlie by making him dig a hole in the hot sun. As Charlie digs, he thinks about his mother, remembering that she comes from a wealthy, powerful family that never approved of her marriage to Charlie's father. Several times a year, Ruth leaves Charlie to stay with her family, far away. Charlie resents his mother for leaving him so often, but he's also sympathetic to her desire for luxury and solitude. By striving to understand Ruth—a woman he seems not to like very much, even though she's his mother—Charlie is training himself to understand far stranger, less forgivable people.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Strangely, of all the horrible things I've encountered and considered recently, dropping a bomb seems to be the least violent among them, even though it's clearly the worst. But there's no evil mug shot, no bloody globe. It's hard to figure out who to blame. There's something clean about all that distance. Maybe the further away you are, the less you have to care, the less you're responsible. But that seems wrong to me. It should be in the news. It's wrong that they died. But if they weren't Jeffrey's family, would I care so much? That's hard. Probably not, I guess. I mean, if you took every bad event in the world to heart, you'd be a horrible mess.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Mrs. Lu, An Lu, Jeffrey Lu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charlie thinks about the news he's just heard: his friend Jeffrey Lu's uncle and aunt were killed in a bombing in the Vietnam War. Charlie feels horrible, but his sympathy is mostly directed at Jeffrey, his best friend. Charlie is less concerned by the death of Jeffrey's relatives than he is by the death of Laura Wishart: one girl's death seems to outweigh an entire village's destruction.

As Charlie's thought process suggests, there's a limit to the amount of compassion and understand one can feel for other people. Nobody can muster sympathy for *everyone* else--one must choose *which* people to feel sympathy for. Proximity and similarity usually determine how much sympathy one feels--i.e., Charlie feels sorriest for the people he knows, or for close friends and relatives of the people he knows (there's also often a subconscious racial or nationalistic aspect to this kind of empathy as well).

Charlie's thoughts also imply that there's a limit to the amount of understanding he'll be able to muster for criminals like Gertrude Baniszewki. Even if it's possible, in an abstract sense, for Charlie to sympathize with this murderer, he simply doesn't have the moral strength to understand and sympathize with all similar people--if he tried to do so, he'd be a "horrible mess."

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Jasper Jones has lost his girl, maybe his best friend, too. His only friend. It seems so infinitely sad to me, I can't even imagine. To lose someone so close, someone he had his hopes pinned on. Someone he was going to escape with, start anew. And to see her, right there, as she was. Right where I'm sitting. What a horrible series of events this has been. But Jasper Jones has to keep that poker face. He has to throw that cloak over his heart. I wonder how much of Jasper's life is spent pretending his doesn't give a shit.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Laura Wishart, Jasper Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie tries to understand what his friend Jasper is going through. Jasper's girlfriend, Laura, has died recently; while a young woman's death would be sad under any circumstances, it's particularly moving since Jasper has few friends--his status as an outsider and a scapegoat in his community means that he's forced to hold his friends especially dear.

Charlie also realizes that Jasper has to hide his emotions: his sadness, his loneliness, and especially his fear. Unlike Charlie, Jasper denies that he's afraid of anything; a lifetime of bullying and scapegoating has trained him to put on a tough face whenever anything frightening happens to him.

I had to make things work when I could. Soon as you can walk and talk, you start makin your own luck. And I don't need some spirit in the sky to help me do that. I can do it on my own. But, see, that's what I reckon, Charlie. It's that part inside me that's stronger and harder than anything else. And I reckon prayer is just trustin in it, havin faith in it, just askin meself to be tough. And that's all you can do.

Related Characters: Jasper Jones (speaker), Charlie Bucktin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jasper tells Charlie about the personal "religion" to which he subscribes. Jasper claims not to believe in any organized faith--he doesn't think there's a god, a heaven, or anything of the kind. Instead, Jasper subscribes to the belief that he is capable of anything: he believes in his own "spirit" of hope and inner strength. Jasper even suggests that all forms of religion are just versions of his own belief in himself; when a Christian, for example, prays to God for help, he's really praying that he'll find the spirit and the courage to help himself.

Jasper's trust in his own abilities parallels Charlie's quest to find bravery and strength through the act of writing. Just as Jasper prays to his spirit in times of uncertainty, so does Charlie turn to writing and self-expression when he's frustrated. Charlie tries to use words to inspire himself to be braver than he thinks possible--to summon the same strength that Jasper embodies.

I look over at An Lu, who is returning to his home, his hands behind his back, his chin on his chest. I wonder what he's thinking. There's something about his posture that convinces me he's judging me poorly. I feel so ashamed, I feel like everyone in this town is disappointed in me. And that's when I resolve it, with my father's hand on my back. When Jasper Jones goes, when he leaves town after this mess is over, I'll be going with him. I'll be leaving too. Leaving Corrigan behind. For good.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), An Lu, Wesley Bucktin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie has just returned from a late-night meeting with Jasper--he's disobeyed his parents' orders to stay in the house. Charlie reunites with his mother and father, both of whom were worried that Charlie--like Laura Wishart (or so they think)--had been kidnapped. As he embraces his parents, Charlie notices that a good chunk of his community has turned out to search for him. The sight of Jeffrey's father, An, among other disappointed neighbors, then convinces Charlie that he wants to leave his hometown as soon as he can.

Although Charlie has just learned that many people in the community are invested in his safety, he seems to take an entirely different conclusion from this. He's exhausted with the constant surveillance of small-town life: he has the sense that someone (whether it's his mother, his father, or Jasper) is always watching him and judging him. Charlie wants to go far away and behave like a free-wheeling character in one of his beloved American novels, such as *On the Road* or *Huckleberry Finn*. The more smothering his parents' attention becomes, the more strongly Charlie feels the need to get away from his family altogether.

Chapter 6 Quotes

I was terrified, but something kicked in me. I discovered a gift for lies. I looked straight at them and offered up the best story I could muster. It was like I'd clicked opened my suitcase and started spinning a thread at my desk. Weaving between the factual and the fictional. It was factitious. And Jeffrey was right, it was all in the delivery. I had them. I'd reeled them in. They all nodded like it was the truth, writing it down on a yellow pad.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Jeffrey Lu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately after returning from his late-night meeting with Jasper Jones, Charlie is taken to speak with the town's police officer. Charlie's parents--afraid that their son was kidnapped by the same person who kidnapped Laura Wishart--have called the police, and now Charlie is forced to lie about his whereabouts (he can't mention anything about Jasper for fear that he'll incriminate Jasper).

Under pressure, Charlie learns some important lessons about the power of writing, and about fear. Although

Charlie is nervous and frightened of being caught in a lie, he uses his intelligence and familiarity with books to craft an elaborate lie that disguises his nervousness perfectly. As we've already seen, Charlie uses writing and communication to keep himself sane--he keeps a diary of his experiences in order to mitigate some of his trauma and anxiety. But here, Charlie uses storytelling to keep himself and Jasper out of danger--and he discovers a pleasure in telling these lies, and convincing others of their truth.

Mostly, I spent the time writing. Almost obsessively. Every day and every night. It's the thing that gave me company. Along with reading, it's what got me out of the house without them being able to stop me at the door.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Ruth Bucktin, Wesley Bucktin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

After being caught sneaking away from the house, Charlie is forbidden from leaving the house at all. Because he has no alternative, Charlie spends his time in his room, reading books and writing. Charlie's love for books allows him to escape from the smallness and dullness of life in his town--he can imagine going elsewhere even when he's imprisoned in his bedroom. In a similar way,Charlie's writing abilities continue to keep him sane. He hasn't forgotten the gruesome spectacle of Laura Wishart's corpse. It's only by writing about his experiences that Charlie avoids becoming wracked with guilt; by putting ink to paper, he establishes a safe distance between himself and his own trauma.

The next ball Jeffrey punches through cover, zipping through for two runs. And it's with complete disbelief that I hear real encouragement from the sideline. His teammates. In unison those belligerent bastards, yelling, "*Shot*, Cong!" across the field, at once turning an insult into a nickname.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Jeffrey Lu

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

Although Jeffrey Lu is hated in his community--he's Vietnamese, and therefore a representative of the country with which Australia is currently fighting a war--he's eventually allowed to play a game of cricket with the rest of his town's team. Surprisingly, Jeffrey's abilities slowly earn him the admiration of his peers--he's so good at cricket, and so useful to his team that eventually his teammates have no choice but to admit it.

Jeffrey's performance in this scene shows one way that minorities have struggled for equality: through personal achievement. It's unfair, of course, that Jeffrey should *have* to succeed at cricket just to be treated as a human being, but it's undeniable that in this instance his talents help convince his peers to accept him, at least for the time being.

"Go *home!*" my father explodes. He stands up, tall and intimidating. He glares with real anger. And I can't help but feel a blush of pride, seeing it. I've been wrong about him.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Wesley Bucktin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, a group of townspeople attack the Lu family's house. They destroy An Lu's prized garden and beat him up--partly because of Jeffrey's success as a cricket player earlier, and partly because of their general hatred for Vietnam (the novel takes place during the Vietnam War). To Charlie's surprise, his father, Wesley, bravely defends An from harm, fighting the gang of townspeople and ordering them to go home.

Charlie is surprised with his father's bravery; based on Wesley's behavior around Charlie's mother, Charlie has imagined that Wesley is generally meek and submissive. As Charlie struggles to summon the bravery to act in his own life, he's inspired by his father's example. Thanks to Wesley's behavior in this passage, Charlie has a new role model.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ We'll be like Kerouac and Cassady. We could steal away in boxcars, ride all the way across the country. Melbourne, Sydney. Every town in between. I could document our adventures. Maybe one day I could get our story published under a nom de plume. I'd have to move to New York City. The famous writer who fled from his hometown and shunned the limelight.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Jasper Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie, increasingly exasperated with his town's behavior, fantasizes about escaping the town altogether, with Jasper Jones by his side. Charlie has read plenty of books about people who travel around the world, never getting too comfortable in any one place. Here, he imagines that he and Jasper could model their behavior on Jack Kerouac, the seminal Beat writer who wrote *On the Road*.

Charlie's fantasies are appealing, but they're also naive and a little cowardly. Charlie has ample reason to hate his town: townspeople have bullied and beaten his best friend's father, simply because he's Vietnamese. And yet Charlie is too hasty in his plan to leave town altogether: he's never had any real experience with being on the road, and wouldn't know the first thing about how to go about moving from place to place. Moreover, Charlie's desire to leave the town suggests that he's still too afraid to stand his ground and protect the people he cares about: he'd rather avoid his peers altogether than protect those in need.

❝ I don't know who this man is, but he didn't kill anybody. I've done everything wrong. Mad Jack Lionel isn't a criminal. He's probably not even mad. He's just old and sad and poor and lonely.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Mad Jack Lionel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Jasper and Charlie go to confront "Mad" Jack Lionel, a grumpy old man, rumored to be a killer, who lives in the town. Jasper is confident that Jack murdered Laura Wishart--he thinks that by talking to Jack face-to-face, he'll be able to convince Jack to confess, clearing his own name in the process.

When Jasper and Charlie visit Jack, however, it quickly becomes clear that Jack 1) didn't kill Laura, and 2) isn't remotely as dangerous as he's rumored to be. Jack's reputation as a crazy, dangerous man is just another example of the townspeople's need for a scapegoat. Just as Charlie's neighbors bully Jeffrey and blame Jasper for everything, so too do they fear Jack. And Jasper, too eager to protect himself from being scapegoated by racist police officers, has accidentally been scapegoating Jack himself.

Here, Charlie begins to realize that Jasper isn't always the clever, confident leader he's pretended to be: on the contrary, he's just a lonely, frightened kid, way out of his depth. Charlie, on the other hand, discovers new levels of bravery and empathy here. Because he tries to understand and sympathize with other people, he has an easier time than Jasper realizing that Jack isn't Laura's murderer, and in fact isn't frightening at all.

❝ We'd gone to confront Mad Jack Lionel about murdering Laura Wishart only to find that he was driving the car that killed Jasper's mother. The world isn't right. It's small and it's nasty and it's lousy with sadness. Under every rock, hidden in every closet, shaken from every tree, it seems there's something horrible I don't want to see. I don't know. Maybe that's why this town is so content to face in on itself, to keep everything so settled and smooth and serene. And at the moment, I can't say as I blame them.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Laura Wishart, Rosie Jones, Jasper Jones, Mad Jack Lionel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie and Jasper have just visited Jack, hoping to convince him to confess to Laura Wishart's murder. Instead, they wind up discovering that Jack is Jasper's own grandfather. Jack had always called out at Jasper whenever he saw him, because he feels responsible for the death of Jasper's mother (Jack was driving the car when Jasper's mother was

rushed to the hospital with appendicitis).

Thinking back on everything he's just learned, Charlie reaches some bitter conclusions: life is a mess; the world is meaningless, etc. Charlie even comes to sympathize with his townspeople--the same people who beat up his best friend's father just a few days before. In the past, Charlie has resented his neighbors for ignoring injustice and pretending that everything is perfect. Now, Charlie can understand his peers' behavior--they're just trying to forget how horrible life can be.

And yet in spite of his understanding, Charlie himself doesn't try to forget about the horrors of life. Instead, he converts these horrors into literature. By writing about Jack, Laura, and Jasper, Charlie finds a more powerful and honest way of coping with tragedy: he deals with his problems head-on instead of repressing them.

> This is what happened. And I've got to get it out quick, I've got to loosen the valve on it and let it go, fizzing and spraying, because it's too hard, it's too heavy, it's too much. I can't hold on to it for too long because it'll burn. Do you understand? It's the knowing. It's always the knowing that's the worst. I wish I didn't have to. I want the stillness back. But I can't. I can't ever get it back. So. Thisiswhathappened.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Eliza Wishart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charlie frantically tries to write down everything he's just learned. We can feel his anxiety as he repeats the words "this is what happened."

Charlie has just discovered that Laura Wishart's father--a respected member of the community--was raping his daughter, and even impregnated her before her death. This piece of information, along with many others, is almost more than Charlie can bear. But where a weaker, less intelligence teenager would be traumatized, Charlie uses his writing to cleanse of himself of some of his trauma. By writing down the horrors of his community, Charlie establishes a firm distance between his self and his horrifying experiences. Put another way, by writing everything down, Charlie seems to say, "I've experienced a lot, but I am still me."

> I also have a suspicion that Eliza might be less concerned with what's right, less concerned about uncovering the truth, than she is about ensuring that she and Jasper Jones, and maybe her father, too, are meted out the penance that she feels they each deserve. I think she wants to do something with all this blame and hurt. I think she just wants to tie rocks to all their feet.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Pete Wishart, Jasper Jones, Eliza Wishart

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

Jasper and Charlie find out the truth about Laura Wishart's death--she hanged herself after being raped by her own father--by talking to Eliza, Laura's sister. Eliza explains that she witnessed Laura's suicide; instead of intervening, she just watched. Eliza insists that the only "right" thing to do is tell the police about her father's actions, ensuring that he'll be arrested for rape and child molestation. Jasper angrily points out that going to the police will implicate him in Laura's death, since he moved Laura's body. But Charlie realizes that Eliza *wants* to punish herself and punish Jasper for their roles in Laura's death.

The passage reiterates Charlie's abilities to understand people's reasons for doing strange things, while also making an important point: sometimes, people do the right thing for the wrong reasons. While Eliza's decision to go to the police might seem like the only moral action, it's also clearly motivated by a desire for revenge.

Chapter 8 Quotes

> It's so smart and sad and beautiful that I'm not even jealous. And I have a warm feeling in my belly that says someone important is going to believe in it. That one day I'll see my father's name on a straight spine on a bookstore shelf, standing proud and strong and bright.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Wesley Bucktin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

Wesley, Charlie's father, has been working on a novel for a

long time. After he's finished with it, Wesley shows his work to Charlie. Although Charlie has previously been jealous of his father's writing, he's proud of his father for writing such a tremendous book, and even hopes that someone will publish it soon.

Charlie's pride in his father shows that he's become more secure in his own identity as a writer. Previously, Charlie was afraid that Wesley was competing with him for literary success; Charlie didn't trust his own literary abilities enough to support any writing other than his own. Now, though, Charlie has the self-confidence to be confident in other people, as well. He has a story of his own to tell, and so he's not concerned about his father finishing his book first.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ But what no spectator that day will ever know or anyone who will later lend their ear to an account, is that it requires more courage for me to tentatively bend and snatch up that rotten fruit from amid that sea of bees. My hands tremble. I can barely work my fingers. But I get them.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Charlie proves his bravery to the townspeople by sneaking onto Mad Jack Lionel's property and completing a traditional town challenge: stealing some of Jack's famous peaches. Unbeknownst to anyone else, Charlie isn't the least bit afraid of sneaking onto Jack's property, since he's now friends with Jack. Instead, the scariest part of Charlie's mission to steal the peaches is picking up the peaches themselves, which are surrounded by bees--Charlie is frightened of bugs and insects, and dislikes having to touch them.

The passage shows that although Charlie is no longer afraid of Mad Jack, he continues to feel *some* irrationalfears, which he then proceeds to overcome. Charlie has learned that Jack shouldn't be feared, but much more importantly, he's learned that fear itself can be dealt with. Like Batman, Charlie doesn't deny his fears; he accepts them and moves past them, reaching into the bees that he finds so disgusting.

❝ And for some reason I'm reminded of Eric Cooke, haggard and angry, at the moment they finally asked him the question. *I just wanted to hurt somebody*, he replied. But that was never the whole story, was it? Only he could have known that, and he held his secrets tight in his fist, in his chest. And there's always more to know. Always. The mystery just gets covered in history. Or is it the other way around. It gets wrested and wrapped in some other riddle. And I think of Jenny Likens, who also watched her sister die, who said nothing until the end, who got brave too late.

Related Characters: Charlie Bucktin (speaker), Eric Edgar Cooke, Jenny Likens

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308-309

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Charlie rushes to the Wishart house to find that Eliza has set it on fire, horribly burning her father. Charlie realizes that Eliza, frustrated that she's unable to alert the police to her father's crimes, has taken matters into her own hands with an act of fiery revenge.

As always, Charlie tries to understand things from Eliza's point of view: he tries to understand how someone could commit a crime that, on the outside, might seem barbaric. Charlie has researched many such crimes--for instance, the murders committed by Eric Cooke, a shy, harelipped man. Previously, Charlie wondered if he could sympathize with Cooke's desire to hurt people. But now he realizes that even Cooke's stated motive for murder wasn't the truth--Cooke's motive must have been more complicated, just as Eliza's reasons for burning down her own house are more complicated than any police officer would be able to determine.

Charlie isn't excusing Eliza *or* Eric Cookie for their actions; rather, he's trying to understand them. While Charlie admits that his understanding will never be perfect, he has one important insight about Eliza. Eliza blames herself for her sister's suicide: by standing back and watching, Eliza allowed her sister to hang herself. Now, Eliza seems to *want* to be punished for her actions. Watching her sister hang herself, Eliza acted to late--now, she's overcompensating for her passivity, lashing out at the world with a big, horrific crime.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

An unidentified narrator says that a young man named Jasper Jones has come to his window. The narrator has no idea why, but guesses that Jasper is desperate and in trouble. The narrator says that he lives in a small "sleepout" with only one window. Because it's summer, and very hot, the narrator reads at night. Tonight, Jasper Jones knocks at the narrator's window, frightening him.

The novel begins on a note of uncertainty. Who is Jasper Jones, who is the narrator, and how do they know each other? There is something charming as well as sinister about this initial scene—it feels both mischievous and adventurous, setting the tone for the novel.

Jasper Jones calls to the narrator, whom he addresses as Charlie, to come out. Charlie does so, thinking that this is the first time he's ever snuck out of his home. He's also excited that Jasper Jones needs his help. As he squeezes through his window, he feels like a foal being born.

This is a symbolic "birth" scene, as Charlie sneaks out of his house for the first time in his life, meaning that, in a way, he is being "reborn" as a new person.

Jasper and Charlie walk through the moonlight, away from Charlie's house. Charlie thinks that his mother is asleep, and he studies Jasper. Jasper is a year older than Charlie, but he's much stronger and bigger. He wears no shoes, and looks like an "island castaway." Before Jasper and Charlie have gone far, Charlie runs to the back steps of his house to fetch his sandals. As he puts them on, he senses that he's somehow proving himself weak and effeminate.

Silvey contrasts Jasper and Charlie. Jasper is rugged, adventurous, and masculine, while Charlie is timid and slightly effeminate. We don't know much about either Charlie or Jasper, but these are their respective "appearances" and first impressions. Silvey will study and question the accuracy of these appearances throughout his novel.

After Charlie puts on his sandals, he and Jasper head out of the small town where Charlie lives: Corrigan, Australia. Jasper offers Charlie a cigarette. Because Charlie has never smoked before, he puffs his cheeks and sighs, as if to say that he's smoked too much already. Jasper shrugs and lights a cigarette for himself.

Cigarettes function as a symbol of masculinity and machismo here. Jasper, as the more experienced adult of the two, is an experienced smoker. Charlie clearly wants to appear mature and manly, which is why he pretends that he smokes.

Jasper and Charlie reach their destination: the house of Mad Jack Lionel. Charlie feels a twinge of fear. Mad Jack is a notorious person among the children of Corrigan, largely because no child has ever seen him. There is a local legend that Mad Jack killed a young woman years ago, and the children like to prove their daring by stealing **peaches** from the tree that stands on his property.

Silvey doesn't tell us much about who these characters are—instead, he tells us what they seem to be to other people. We can sense that there's a lot more to the story of Jack Lionel than meets the eye, but for now, we're stuck with the tantalizing mystery of how he killed the young woman.

Charlie wonders if Jasper has brought him to Mad Jack's house to steal a **peach**, and hopes that this isn't the case. Charlie wants to become more popular, and stealing a peach would guarantee this—but he's neither fast nor brave. He asks Jasper where they're going, and Jasper says that they must keep moving. Jasper adds that he's seen Mad Jack many times, and Charlie believes him. When Charlie asks Jasper what Mad Jack looks like, Jasper ignores him and walks on.

Here, we get the first hint that Jasper's aura of maturity and bravery isn't entirely accurate. He doesn't say what Mad Jack looks like, implying that he may be stretching the truth about having seen him many times. We also begin to get a sense of life in Corrigan, where bravery, speed, and athleticism are the principal virtues. People like Charlie, who seemingly lack all three, are outcasts automatically.

As Charlie and Jasper walk along the river, Charlie thinks of everything he knows about Jasper. Jasper's mother is dead, and his father is "no good." Jasper has a reputation for being a thief and a criminal. As a result, the other families of Corrigan warn their children to be good, or they'll end up like Jasper. When the children do something wrong, they can blame Jasper, and their parents almost always believe them.

Jasper is an outcast in Corrigan, and this is clearly what attracts Charlie to him, at least in part. Charlie romanticizes Jasper's status as a roamer, and he seems to find a similarity between his own outsider status and Jasper's—although Charlie obviously doesn't have to experience all the economic difficulties and racial prejudice that Jasper does.

Once, Charlie heard that Jasper was "half-caste." He brought this up with his father, who is a calm, intelligent man. When he did so, his father became angry, and told Charlie that it was impolite to talk about people's race. Later, he gave Charlie a collection of books by Southern authors: Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Harper Lee, and Mark Twain. Charlie was pleased, because he'd always wanted to read his father's books. He enjoyed Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* best, though he told his father that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was his favorite.

With Jasper (and later Jeffrey Lu), racism becomes one of the key themes of the book. It's notable that Charlie's father thinks it's impolite to talk about race. The townspeople of Corrigan judge people based on their race constantly, but almost never talk about race explicitly. We also see the extent of Charlie's love for literature. Elements and motifs from Lee, Faulkner, and Twain show up again and again in the novel. Jack Lionel, for instance, resembles Boo Radley from To Kill a Mockingbird.

Charlie thinks about how he fits into Corrigan. As a lover of books, he's something of an outcast, since most of the children love sports, and most of their parents work at a mine. Charlie is a good student and bad at sports, meaning that he's generally resented. His best and only friend is a Vietnamese boy named Jeffrey Lu, who's a year younger than Charlie and skipped a grade of school. Jeffrey is bullied because he's Vietnamese. Still, he's always optimistic, and in many ways braver than the children who steal **peaches** from Mad Jack. Besides Jeffrey, Charlie's only competitor for being the cleverest student in school is Eliza Wishart—and he has a crush on her.

Charlie is drawn to other social outcasts, even if they're outcasts for different reasons. Thus, his best friend is Jeffrey—not a particularly bookish person, it would seem, but still shunned for being Vietnamese. The fact that the novel takes place during the Vietnam War is important as well, since it helps to explain—though not justify—the racism of the townspeople toward Asian families like Jeffrey's. We also see Charlie thinking about bravery and hope in this section. Charlie's progress from a coward to a hero forms a major arc of the novel.

Charlie follows Jasper away from the river. He asks Jasper where they're going, but Jasper only tells him to follow. Charlie thinks that he and Jasper have barely spoken before tonight, and in fact, he's surprised that Jasper knows his name at all. Charlie wonders what would happen if he were to disappear tonight—his parents would probably assume that he'd been kidnapped. Funnily enough, he thinks, he would then be the only child in town who could honestly say that Jasper had gotten him into trouble.

Charlie is attracted to Jasper without knowing anything about him, and it's difficult, as of now, to see exactly why this is. One hint Silvey gives is that Charlie is a voracious reader, so he may be romanticizing Jasper, treating him like a rugged character from one of his beloved Southern books. Charlie is also aware, Silvey suggests, that Jasper doesn't deserve his reputation for being a criminal or a vandal.

Jasper leads Charlie into a thick patch of bushes. He stops here, and tells Charlie to look through a wattlebush. He adds that he thinks he can trust Charlie. Charlie thinks that if it were anybody other than Jasper, he would leave immediately. Yet for reasons he can't fully explain, Charlie stares through the bush. There he sees a dead girl, wearing a white nightdress. She has dirt and bruises on her face, and she is hanging by the neck from a eucalyptus tree. Charlie's eyes fill with tears, and he feels himself silently screaming, but he can't look away. Jasper cannot bear to look.

This is arguably the central image of the novel, one that Charlie will try and fail to get out of his head for the next 300 pages. The sight of a dead girl comes as a huge surprise to the reader as well—previously, we'd thought of this book as being a childish adventure, not a gruesome horror story. Silvey is fond of disrupting the reader's expectations in this way. It's also psychologically significant that Charlie continues to look at the girl while Jasper averts his eyes—Charlie is the archetypal author/narrator, a dedicated observer who doesn't look away, even when the sight is horrific.

Charlie, terrified by the sight of the dead girl, asks Jasper who it is. Jasper tells him that the girl is Laura Wishart. He insists that Charlie help him, since Jasper doesn't know what to do. He explains that Laura is hanging from the same rope that Jasper uses to swing. Because Jasper always hides his rope by wrapping it around a high, inaccessible branch, it's impossible that Laura hanged herself—she was murdered.

Silvey begins to establish the central mystery of the novel—who killed Laura? Right away, Jasper is a suspect, since it is his rope from which Laura now hangs. In only a few pages, Silvey has established one idea of what kind of novel this will be, and then established a completely different idea. This won't be a clichéd adventure yarn—it's a tough, often horrific mystery.

Charlie, still panicking at the sight of the dead girl, asks Jasper if he killed Laura. Jasper looks confused and disdainful, and denies that he has anything to do with the girl's death. Still, Jasper says, Laura died at the same place in the bushes that he has been using as a makeshift shelter. He points to Laura's face and says that someone beat her before she died. Charlie feels as if he's living in a nightmare. He looks at Laura's body and thinks that it's nothing but an empty bag now.

Even Charlie, who likes Jasper, can't help but think that Jasper is somehow responsible. There's something childishly innocent about the fact that Charlie asks Jasper, point blank, if he killed Laura—one can imagine the adults of Corrigan simply accusing Jasper of the crime instead of asking. Charlie also shows his identity as a writer here. Even when he's looking on a horrific sight, he has an instinct to transform his horror through metaphor and analogy—thus, Laura is an "empty bag."

Charlie insists that he and Jasper have to alert the police to Laura's death, a suggestion that Jasper immediately disagrees with, since the police will undoubtedly blame him for the crime. Charlie denies that this will happen, but Jasper points out that even Charlie immediately thought of Jasper when he saw the dead body. Charlie realizes that Jasper is right: everyone in Corrigan will blame Jasper for the girl's death. Jasper insists that they must find the real criminals responsible.

Silvey covers the basic "logistics" of the book—Jasper and Charlie must "race against the clock" to clear Jasper's name and find Laura's killer. The assumption here is that the truth will ultimately triumph. By discovering who killed Laura, Jasper and Charlie can disrupt the townspeople's racist assumption of Jasper's guilt.

Charlie asks Jasper if he ever brought Laura to the bushes. Jasper replies that he did, but always by a circuitous path. This prevented Laura from learning how to get to the bushes by herself. Jasper preferred to be the only one to know how to get there. He tells Charlie that "it wasn't like that," a statement that Charlie doesn't understand at all. Jasper explains that Laura was clever, but not like Charlie—her cleverness was a kind of "wisdom."

Jasper seems to allude to sex in this section, and the "it" he refers to is beyond the young, naïve Charlie's comprehension. Though we never get a direct portrait of Laura in this novel, we get a lot of information from other *characters about the kind of person she was. Jasper's description of her as "wise" is the first indirect description of Laura, but not the last.*

Jasper tells Charlie that he thinks Mad Jack killed Laura, since Jack often saw him walking with Laura. Charlie is furious that Jasper would bring him into a dangerous area, when it's possible that Mad Jack is there. He turns to leave, but then remembers that he has no idea how to get back home. Jasper puts his hand on Charlie and tells him to calm down, adding that he knows Charlie is "a good sort." He explains that he and Charlie must track down Laura's real killer before the police find out about her death and arrest him for the crime. Charlie shakes his head and tells Jasper that they're not detectives—they won't be able to solve the crime by themselves.

It's ironic that Jasper is scapegoating Jack Lionel in exactly the same manner that he knows the townspeople will scapegoat him for Laura's death. Instead of looking to the facts, Jasper assumes Jack's guilt based on his reputation, a reputation whose accuracy Jasper doesn't know. Charlie's reluctance to go along with Jasper is both prudent and cowardly—in part, he's smart enough to know that it'll be difficult to find any evidence, but he's also just too afraid to question Mad Jack.

Even as he tells Jasper that they won't be able to track down Laura's killer themselves, Charlie feels a part of himself wanting to conduct the investigation. Jasper might be right, he thinks—maybe the police would arrest Jasper, and maybe Mad Jack is responsible. Although he prefers reading books to solving crimes, he feels a little proud that Jasper chose him out of everyone in the town. Charlie feels like Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird*: calm, intelligent, and committed to justice.

For the first, but not the last time, Charlie compares himself to Atticus Finch, the calm, brilliant lawyer in Lee's novel. Throughout the book, Charlie will measure himself against his literary heroes, and almost always come up short. Charlie's love for literature is instrumental in inspiring him to help Jasper. He wants to be like Atticus, and so he overcomes his initial fears and sets the book's plot in motion.

Charlie proposes that he tell the police about Laura's death without mentioning Jasper's name. Jasper refuses to let Charlie do this. If the police find out about the clearing in the bushes, he says, then other girls will come forward, saying that Jasper brought them there, and so Jasper will be a prime suspect in Laura's death. This will also make Charlie an accessory after the fact, since he will have tried to cover for Jasper. Charlie then proposes that he and Jasper move the body, but Jasper refuses to help with this either. He says the police will see that the body has been moved, and trace the steps back to the bushes.

Jasper's explanation implicates Charlie in Jasper's actions for the first time in the book. Charlie isn't just a passive observer or helper anymore—he's an accessory after the fact, as Jasper makes very clear. We see how persuasive Jasper can be—whenever Charlie has a reservation or doubt, Jasper manages to convince him otherwise.

Jasper proposes that he and Charlie throw Laura's body in the river, so that no one else will find it before he and Charlie have found the real killer. Charlie finds this disgusting and immoral, since it will deny Laura's family the ability to perform last rites on Laura's body. Jasper argues that Laura's parents are "no good," and besides, they'll be more interested in the truth about who killed Laura then about how she was buried. Charlie finds it difficult to respond—he keeps staring at Laura's body, swinging eerily in the breeze.

Charlie seems more compassionate and understanding than Jasper, but it's not clear if his compassion is justified or not. Even as Jasper goes over the logistics of Laura's murder, Silvey reminds us of the sheer eeriness of her death, as Charlie continues to stare at Laura's body waving in the breeze. There's an unmistakable racial element to this image as well. Both in Australia and in the Southern novels Charlie reads, blacks could often be lynched without a trial, and Laura's hanging body (even though she's white) feels like a reminder of this racial violence.

Jasper tells Charlie to focus—Charlie has to help Jasper prove his innocence. Jasper explains that he's always been blamed for everything—to the rest of the town, he's an animal "with half a vote." He encourages Charlie to be brave, and tells him to look around the area for evidence. Too traumatized to say no, Charlie looks around with Jasper. They find footprints leading back the way Jasper usually took Laura, and also some trampled grass that might suggest that Laura tried to escape before she died.

Jasper seems to be the "voice of reason" in this scene. Charlie is too distracted and frantic to concentrate on anything for more than a few seconds. Jasper, by contrast, seems to be in control of his emotions. He has the will and the determination to do what is necessary—or at least what he thinks is necessary.

Jasper climbs the eucalyptus tree where Laura is hanging, intending to cut her down. As he climbs, Charlie thinks about Jeffrey Lu, who is undoubtedly awake at the moment, thinking about the upcoming cricket match featuring his favorite player, Doug Walters. Charlie notices that Jasper is climbing very skillfully, using his strength and agility, and he doubts that Jack Lionel, an old man, could have climbed the tree. Jasper reaches the branch where Laura is hanging, and, without looking at her, uses a small knife he carries on his belt to cut the rope. Laura's body falls to the ground with a horrible thud. Charlie's heart is beating rapidly, but he can't force himself to move.

Even in the midst of crisis, Charlie's mind wanders to more pleasant things, such as his best friend, Jeffrey. It's as if Charlie's mind has the power to reflexively avoid thinking about horrifying things. It's important to notice that Charlie doubts Mad Jack's involvement in Laura's death from the very beginning, for very good, practical reasons—it would be impossible for an old man to climb that tree. Charlie remains largely passive in this scene, as his fear paralyzes him and prevents him from doing anything.

Jasper climbs back down the eucalyptus tree and walks to where Laura's body is now lying. He tries to untie the knot in the rope around her neck. Charlie is terrified, but he kneels down next to Jasper. Jasper says, "Hey, Charlie," very casually. Unable to untie the knot, he uses his knife to cut the rope around her neck. He notes that the rope isn't really a noose at all—the knot isn't tight enough, suggesting that Laura may not have been hanged at all. Jasper carefully pulls away the rope, revealing that Laura's neck is covered in dark marks and scratches.

Jasper's casualness is both impressive and terrifying in this moment. What other things, one wonders, has Jasper seen that allow him to remain so casual now? Jasper's examination of Laura's body yields important new evidence as well. She was already hurt before she died, suggesting that the mystery of Laura's death is even more complicated than Charlie and Jasper first thought.

As Charlie stares at Laura's body, he senses that he'll never be able to forget her. She looks warm and eerily peaceful, almost as if she's sleeping. Charlie thinks that Laura looks a lot like her sister, Eliza, and wonders what will happen when Eliza finds out about Laura's death. As Charlie thinks, Jasper walks into the darkness, and returns a moment later carrying a heavy block of granite, which he ties around Laura's feet using the rope. Charlie notices that Jasper is tying Laura's feet very gently, and he wonders if Jasper and Laura were in love.

Even if Jasper's behavior sometimes seems callous and even sociopathic in this scene, Silvey gives him enough compassion to stroke Laura's body tenderly before he throws her in the river. In many ways, Jasper is actually more compassionate than Charlie here. Whereas Charlie thinks that the "right thing" would be to take Laura to her family, Jasper's feelings for Laura are based on personal, intimate emotion, not any sense of social obligation.

Jasper gently runs his hand against Laura's cheek. For some reason, the sight of Jasper doing this makes Charlie conscious for the first time that he is an accomplice in a crime. Even so, when Jasper tells him to help him pick up Laura, he does so, feeling as if he's trapped in another person's body. As he and Jasper carry Laura to the river, he feels the body slipping from his hands. Jasper urges him to be careful, and his words encourage Charlie to find new strength, which he uses to carry the body the rest of the way. Charlie feels as if he's "getting brave," as Jasper told him to do.

Jasper's powers of leadership are on full display in this scene. Simply for Jasper to say the words, "be careful" is enough to invigorate Charlie and encourage him to carry Laura's body to the water. This shows that Charlie, even in the depths of his trauma, has huge respect for Jasper. This also suggests, for the first but not the last time in the novel, that courage is a choice—one can "choose" to be brave, drawing inspiration from even the most banal of expressions.

At the river, Jasper directs Charlie to swing Laura's body into the water. They swing the body three times, and Charlie feels like they're playing a childish game. They throw the body into the river, and it lands with a dull "plunk." Charlie watches the body float for a few seconds before the granite stone pulls it to the bottom of the river. He senses that he and Jasper are monsters—they have drowned a girl. He wonders what Laura was doing that afternoon—perhaps spending time with her sister, or walking around the town.

The gruesomeness of this scene hinges upon Silvey's juxtaposition of horrific and childish imagery. The combination, for instance, of a dead body and a childhood game is more terrifying than the description of a dead body by itself could ever be. The feelings of guilt hit Charlie almost immediately after he throws Laura. He won't be able to totally shake off these feelings for the remainder of the book.

Charlie turns and sees that Jasper is bent over, shaking. The sight of Jasper collapsed on the ground makes Charlie weep. He feels drained. At the same time, he's reluctant to let Jasper know that he's weeping—thus, he doesn't sniff.

Here, we get another sign that Jasper isn't as "cool" and mature as Charlie thinks he is. Jasper, too, shows weakness and "effeminate" emotion. Nevertheless, there's a clear pecking order of maturity in this scene, as Charlie, not Jasper, is the one who weeps.

Charlie notices that Jasper is holding a small bottle without a label. Jasper takes a swig, and offers Charlie the bottle. Charlie doesn't take it, but asks for a cigarette. Jasper gives him one, and Charlie sticks it in his mouth the wrong way, which makes Jasper smile. Charlie reverses the cigarette, and Jasper lights it. Charlie coughs, never having smoked before, though he says that he's only coughing because of the humidity. They lie on the ground by the river for a few minutes, Charlie coughing and Jasper drinking.

Charlie and Jasper engage in some friendly, masculine bonding. There's something disturbing about the fact that they attempt to do this so soon after throwing a dead girl's body into a river, but perhaps this is exactly Silvey's point—there's always something artificial and desperate about these displays of manhood. If smoking is a sign of manhood, then clearly Charlie isn't a man yet.

After a few moments of silence, Charlie tells Jasper that he feels like he's in a dream. Jasper says he knows what Charlie means, and tells him that Laura was everything to him—she was his mother, his sister, his friend, and his family. He offers Charlie the bottle again, and this time Charlie accepts it. Jasper informs him that it contains Bushmills. Charlie finds this alcohol disgusting. He thinks that now he's tried and hated two things that his literary heroes (Sal Paradise, Huck Finn, and Holden Caulfield) revered: booze and cigarettes. He lies and tells Jasper that he doesn't like the drink because he usually drinks only single malt. Jasper doesn't press for more details, but explains that he took the bottle from his father, who can't hold his liquor because he's white. He insists that he never steals anything from his father that he doesn't really need.

Even though Charlie "fails" the test of masculinity by coughing after he inhales the cigarette, he becomes closer friends with Jasper in this scene. This suggests that Jasper doesn't want a masculine, macho friend—he simply wants a friend. We also see where Charlie gets the desire to be a man, as he idolizes masculine literary heroes in books by Kerouac and Twain. Even though Silvey shows that these idols are unrealistic and a little shallow (there's nothing especially satisfying or heroic about drinking whiskey), he continues to portray Jasper in romanticized terms, like someone out of a Kerouac novel. Thus, Jasper is still very much the "Robin Hood"-style lovable rogue, who steals and lies, but is nonetheless a good man.

Jasper continues to tell Charlie about his father. He explains that his father spends all of his money on whores and alcohol, rather than buying Jasper three meals a day. For this reason, Jasper is forced to steal his food from others—sometimes strangers, sometimes his father. As Jasper continues drinking, he explains that he is never accused of the crimes he committed: he's only blamed for crimes of which he's innocent. Charlie asks Jasper if he ever feels guilty for taking things, but Jasper says that he never does. He believes that he's had a rough life, and thus he deserves everything he steals. At the same time, Jasper refuses to go through life believing that he's a victim.

Silvey establishes great sympathy for Jasper Jones. Previously, we'd wondered if Jasper was trustworthy or not, and if Charlie should believe his insistence of innocence. Here, however, he makes it very difficult to question Jasper—he's clearly the victim of an abusive father and a broken home. Silvey will spend large portions of his novel analyzing the themes of guilt, innocence, and freedom that he first raises in this section. In any case, there is something indisputably inspiring about Jasper rising above the circumstances of his life.

Jasper takes another drink from the bottle, and tells Charlie that he thinks about leaving Corrigan one day and making his fortune in the oyster business in the north. He asks Charlie what his plans are for the future, and Charlie feels uncomfortable—it seems strange to talk about the future so soon after having thrown Laura in the river. Nevertheless, he tells Jasper, a little nervously, that he dreams of becoming a writer. To Charlie's surprise, Jasper is supportive of this plan, and tells Charlie that he'll have to write Jasper's story one day. Hearing Jasper say this makes Charlie believe that his dreams of becoming a writer are plausible.

Both Jasper and Charlie have fantasies of escape from the small, claustrophobic town they've grown up in. Jasper's interest in Charlie's dreams of being a writer suggests that he has sympathy for anyone who, like him, feels dissatisfied with Corrigan. This mirrors the sympathy that Charlie feels for Jasper, even before Charlie knows anything about him. Charlie is clearly a little insecure about his plans of writing—if something as banal as a friend's encouragement can make him feel more confident, then he can't have been very confident to begin with.

Jasper finishes the bottle of Bushmills, and almost as soon as he does so, he turns and vomits. He explains to Charlie that he can hold his liquor—just not for long. Suddenly, Charlie notices that it's dawn—he must return to his house before his parents discover that he's missing. Charlie and Jasper walk back through the town of Corrigan, and Charlie feels as if he and Jasper are old friends.

Here we get another big hint that Jasper's masculinity and bravery aren't as certain as they seem. This is a reminder that Jasper, like Charlie, is still just a child, out of his element and caught up in a big, disturbing crime.

As Charlie and Jasper pass by the center of Corrigan, the Miners' Hall, Charlie thinks about Jasper. Though he's still terrified by the sight of Laura hanging from the tree, he feels thrilled that Jasper views him as a friend and an equal, and that he and Jasper are working together to solve a mystery. He also thinks that Jasper is worthy of respect for surviving on his own from an early age. Charlie feels guilty for having a house and parents to take care of him.

Charlie is still a romantic in this portion of the novel. He wants to believe Jasper, because he's hungry for adventures like the kind he's read about in his favorite novels. Silvey also suggests that Charlie wants to help Jasper because of a deep sense of guilt about his own wealth and privilege. Because he has money and parents, Charlie thinks he owes Jasper his loyalty.

Charlie and Jasper arrive back at Charlie's house. Jasper helps Charlie climb back into his room through his window. He says he'll see Charlie soon, and runs away. Alone in his room, Charlie becomes conscious that he's very dirty and sweaty. He thinks about the facts: Laura was hanging from a tree, she's now in the river, and only Jasper knew the area where they found her. Charlie concludes that, while he doesn't know what the future will hold, he feels comfortable having Jasper as a friend and ally.

Silvey ends the first chapter with a summary of everything we've learned about Charlie so far. He's rational, calm, and intelligent. At the same time, he has a soft spot for adventure and mystery, and this sometimes blurs his clear-cut decisions about what to do. Finally, he idolizes Jasper Jones out of all proportion, more for what he seems to represent than for what he actually is.

CHAPTER 2

The morning after the events of the previous chapter, Charlie wakes up covered in sweat. For a split second, his mind is blank, and then he remembers everything that happened the night before. He notices that there's a ring of grime and dirt around him in bed. He goes to the bathroom, urinates, and draws a bath. Charlie then washes himself with granite soap. He looks at his body—he's scrawny and pale, nothing like Jasper Jones.

There's something poignant about the moments before Charlie remembers why he's so sweaty and dirty. For now, he doesn't know how lucky he is to be able to forget about the sight of Laura's body, even if it's only for a split second. Charlie also continues to think of himself as immature and cowardly, just because his body is not as developed as Jasper's.

It occurs to Charlie that Jasper may have been responsible for Laura's death after all. While Charlie finds this possibility unlikely, based on the time he's spent with Jasper, he admits to himself that he barely knows Jasper Jones at all. Jasper's biggest alibi, Charlie thinks, is that he went to Charlie for help—if Jasper *had* killed Laura, he would never have brought anyone else to the scene of the crime. Charlie also finds it difficult to doubt anything Jasper says, because he speaks with such conviction.

Even after he agrees to help Jasper, Charlie continues to have some doubts and reservations. Just because Jasper is a victim of racism doesn't mean it's necessarily racist to suspect Jasper of the crime. Still, Charlie is able to reason his way through Jasper's guilt, and decides, for very intelligent reasons, that Jasper is probably innocent.

Charlie walks into the kitchen, where his parents are sitting. For a moment, he thinks that they're going to demand to know where he was the night before—but instead they laugh and tease him for sleeping too late. His mother sarcastically asks him if he's enjoyed his stay in the "hotel." Charlie thinks that his mother is always sarcastic, especially when she's annoyed with something, which she nearly always is. Charlie tells his mother that her hair looks nice, a remark that she treats with great suspicion, eventually snapping, "Thank you." Charlie's father finds this exchange amusing. Charlie's mother gives him coffee, which Charlie accepts silently.

Silvey establishes the dynamic between Charlie and his parents right away. Charlie doesn't get along with his mother, and vice versa—she doesn't understand his personality, and he doesn't "get" her humor. Charlie's father, by contrast, is gentle and kind, and doesn't try to tease Charlie to the same degree his wife does.

Charlie's father asks him what he was doing last night. Charlie explains that he was up late reading *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. His father muses that it's been years since he read that. He also tells Charlie that Jeffrey has been waiting for Charlie to wake up. Charlie remembers that today is the day of the "Test"—an important trial run for professional cricketers—featuring Jeffrey's favorite cricket player. Jeffrey is probably listening to the match via radio right now. Charlie finds cricket dull, but he gets up to leave the house and find Jeffrey, quickly drinking all the coffee his mother gave him.

Charlie and his father clearly have a closer bond than do Charlie and his mother. They love many of the same things—writing, reading, etc. It's a little comical that Charlie can be thinking about cricket and his friends so soon after seeing a dead body, but perhaps this testifies to Silvey's ability to find humor and lightness in the darkest of places—and also to portray the distractibility of the teenage mind. Charlie goes to see Jeffrey, who will be the source of much comic relief in the book.

In the hot sun, Charlie walks to Jeffrey Lu's house, which is near his own. Jeffrey's mother greets Charlie warmly and tells him that the cricket match has been rained out. Charlie walks into the house and finds Jeffrey, who calls Charlie an idiot for missing most of the match. Jeffrey's mother brings them food, and Charlie and Jeffrey laugh and joke when she tells Jeffrey to let Charlie eat first.

Immediately, Silvey shows that Charlie's relationship with Jeffrey is largely based on good-natured "trash talking." As much as the two friends insult each other, they clearly like and respect one another a great deal. Charlie's friendship with Jeffrey is proof of his attraction to outsiders, and his indifference to the racist status quo of the town.

Jeffrey asks Charlie if he'd rather be burned or frozen to death. Charlie finds the question silly, but Jeffrey presses on, and teases Charlie about Eliza Wishart. This reminds Charlie of the sight of Laura Wishart's body. He feels nauseous, and tells Jeffrey to "piss off." Jeffrey seems not to notice Charlie's internal agony—he continues telling jokes, and notes that his mother doesn't know swear words in English. Charlie contemplates telling Jeffrey about Laura. He decides not to, though he has a strong urge to blurt it out.

Right away, Charlie struggles with the challenges of keeping a secret from one of his closest friends. Charlie may seem to be acting normal to Jeffrey (who comes across as a little oblivious in this scene) but inside, he's going through the agony of reliving the night before. Charlie will consider telling many other people about Laura, but he'll almost never give in to his urge, nobly keeping Jasper's secret safe.

Jeffrey and Charlie spend the rest of the afternoon listening to the radio for more information about the cricket match, even though it's been rained out. Then they play Scrabble, which Charlie wins. Jeffrey tells his mother that they're going to play "fucking cricket," knowing that she won't understand the swear word. They go outside to play cricket at the courts on the eastern side of town. Charlie is horrible at cricket, but Jeffrey is uncannily talented, despite being small and thin. Charlie notes that Jeffrey will be great if he's ever given the chance to play a real game of cricket.

Charlie's observation about Jeffrey is a dark, poignant reminder that Jeffrey is the victim of racial stereotyping not just in his town, but in his entire country—there's no way a Vietnamese boy will ever be allowed to play professional sports at this time, not even in Sydney, the capital. With this in mind, it's impressive that Jeffrey remains as bright and optimistic as he does—he seems to have an almost magical ability to ignore his misfortune. Charlie, as we've seen, lacks this gift, and that's why he can't stop thinking about Laura.

Jeffrey and Charlie walk to the eastern side of Corrigan and bicker about superheroes. Jeffrey argues that Spiderman is useless outside of New York City, because there's nothing for him to swing from in smaller towns like Corrigan. The best superhero, he continues, is Superman, because he's the most powerful in every way. Charlie counters that Superman is *too* powerful—he's boring. As they argue, Jeffrey good-naturedly insults Charlie by calling him an idiot and a Communist. Charlie argues that **Batman** is the best superhero—despite the fact that he has no superpowers, he is highly intelligent, strong, and resourceful. Superman needs no courage or intelligence, since he's essentially invincible, while Batman requires great bravery to fight crime. Jeffrey finds it difficult to disagree with Charlie, but he concludes that Superman could beat Batman in a fight.

This exchange about superheroes will become very important later on, but for the time being, it's important to note that Jeffrey adopts the side of the invincible, perfect superman, while Charlie defends Batman, who has flaws, weaknesses, and secrets that Superman, as an alien, lacks entirely. This corresponds to the internal conflicts that Charlie goes through during the novel. It's as if he empathizes with Batman because he knows how horrible it can be to experience death and other tragedies. Jeffrey, who is happier and more optimistic, sees no point in "wallowing" in sadness. For him, Superman is better, case closed.

As Charlie and Jeffrey argue about superheroes, Jeffrey points out Eliza Wishart walking toward them from down the street. Charlie notices that she looks redder and thinner than usual. She is usually a little nervous, Charlie thinks. He feels a strong temptation to tell her about Laura, and to assure her that Jasper Jones didn't kill her. When Eliza crosses paths with Charlie and Jeffrey, she greets Charlie cheerily, but Charlie doesn't reply, noticing that Eliza's eyes look like Laura's. When Eliza has walked on, Jeffrey teases Charlie about his silence.

Even in the midst of his fear and anxiety, Charlie continues to be attracted to Eliza. Nevertheless, his attraction is somewhat minimized by the resemblance between Laura and Eliza, as Charlie isn't ready to think about Laura, not even in this indirect way. It's clear that Eliza will be an important part of the novel, however, especially because she's related to the murder victim.

When Jeffrey and Charlie arrive at the cricket courts, they see that the courts are occupied by the Corrigan Country Week, the local cricket team. Charlie wants to turn back, but Jeffrey insists that they try to play around the others. They walk toward the players, and Charlie notices that Warwick Trent, his "arch-nemesis," is playing. Warwick is a large, bullying boy who's in Charlie's grade because he's been held back twice. He's stolen more **peaches** from Mad Jack's trees than anyone else, and he claims that he's had sex. Whenever Charlie uses a big word in class, Warwick beats him up later. This has only encouraged Charlie to read and study more, learning new words and writing stories and poems in notebooks.

Warwick is the embodiment of everything Charlie hates about Corrigan. Warwick is stupid, close-minded, aggressively athletic, and masculine without being kind, charming, charismatic, or helpful. We also see that Charlie is braver than we'd initially thought—instead of giving into Warwick and refraining from using big words, Warwick's bullying encourages Charlie to use more big words than ever. Even if Charlie lacks the bravery to sneak onto Mad Jack's property, he expresses his bravery in other, subtler ways.

Charlie notices that Jeffrey is approaching Warwick and his friends. Warwick calls Jeffrey a "gook" and tells him to "fuck off." Charlie thinks about how these exchanges at the cricket courts usually go. Jeffrey is sometimes allowed to play with Warwick, and on these occasions, the other players aim their serves to his body, taking bets on what they can hit. Jeffrey is an excellent "bowler" (in cricket, the counterpart to a pitcher), but his talent wins him little respect. Today, Charlie watches as Jeffrey bowls to Jacob Irving, who misses the ball. He sneers and calls Jeffrey "Cong," which makes the other players, including their coach, laugh.

The fact that these exchanges have happened many other times indicates that Jeffrey is even more of an optimist than we'd initially suspected. Long after most people would leave, either because of anger or hopelessness, Jeffrey continues to show up, savoring every opportunity to play his favorite game. The racism of the cricket team members is an illustration of the town's racial hierarchy, but also a sign of their own insecurities—they insult Jeffrey because *he's better at cricket than they are.*

Charlie thinks about Jasper Jones's talents as a football player. While Jeffrey is mocked in spite of his abilities as a cricketer, Jasper has earned a grudging respect from his teammates on the Corrigan Colts. He is smaller and younger than the other players, but he's nonetheless intimidating, strong, and fast. Even the same people who ignore Jasper in public cheer for him when he's playing football for Corrigan. Perhaps Jeffrey hasn't won the same limited respect for himself because cricket isn't a game of aggression like football.

As frustrating as it may be, one of the only ways for non-white people to gain respect in the town of Corrigan is to play sports. Clearly, however, there is a limit to how far the white townspeople are willing to go in letting go of their own prejudices. Jeffrey, so far, has won no respect in spite of his athletic prowess, and even Jasper, held up by Charlie as an example of how athleticism can empower minorities, only wins a brief, fleeting moment of respect before he's scapegoated again.

Jeffrey continues to bowl for the cricket team. His throws are excellent, but when the ball rolls off the court, the other players refuse to help him by throwing the ball back to him—instead, Jeffrey must run after the ball himself. The players make fun of Jeffrey and Charlie. Charlie privately wishes that Jasper were with him—Jasper could beat up Warwick, just as Warwick beats up Charlie. As Charlie thinks all this, he notices that Eliza Wishart is walking by the cricket court. She waves, and Charlie waves back at her, smiling. He imagines walking over to her and asking her to come to the river with him—there, he'd show Eliza Laura.

Jeffrey endures bullying and harassment from the other players, but continues to be energetic and optimistic. Charlie, by contrast, can't act so optimistic, mostly because he has a huge secret to conceal. For the second time, he contemplates telling someone else about Laura, and once again, he refrains from doing so. This testifies to his enormous loyalty to Jasper Jones. As much as he likes Eliza, his father, and Jeffrey, Charlie respects Jasper and his innocence even more.

Just as Charlie resolves to walk over to Eliza, Warwick yells out. Charlie turns and sees that he's pulled out his penis and is waving it at Eliza. Eliza walks away from the courts, very quickly. Charlie hopes that Eliza doesn't think that Charlie is friends with Warwick.

Eliza clearly isn't attracted to Warwick, with his vulgar displays of masculinity. This scene is a clue that Eliza is actually more attracted to Charlie, who offers an alternative to the aggressiveness and cruelty of Corrigan.

Charlie thinks that in only a few hours, Laura will be reported missing. He can't imagine how anyone could murder a girl, and doubts that Jasper has bought himself more than a few hours by throwing Laura in the river. As he muses about this, Charlie notices that Jeffrey has bowled to the batsman, even though the other players are continuing to mock him. The batsman hits Jeffrey's cricket ball out of the court, into the trees. This crushes Charlie, since he knows that the ball was a birthday gift that Jeffrey loved.

Charlie is deep in thought about Laura and the implications of murder, but he isn't completely immersed in these thoughts—he also has the perception and sympathy to feel sorry for Jeffrey when Jeffrey loses his prized cricket ball. This illustrates how much he likes Jeffrey, in spite of the insults he throws at his friend for hours at a time.

Charlie notices that the cricket coach is chuckling at the other players' mockery of Jeffrey. Furious, Charlie thinks that the coach may be capable of murdering a girl. Meanwhile, Jeffrey leaves the court and rejoins Charlie. He smiles and brags about his bowls, and Charlie jokingly compares him to Muhammad Ali. Charlie mutters that he hates Warwick and his friends. Jeffrey points out that if no one had stolen Muhammad Ali's bicycle, he would never have learned how to box. He also tells Charlie that Eliza has been following Charlie around town, probably because she likes him.

Silvey shows how the two "halves" of this chapter fit together: Charlie's observations about Jeffrey's mistreatment effectively answer his questions about how a resident of Corrigan could be capable of murder. Clearly, the townspeople are capable of enormous cruelty and meanness. At the same time, some townspeople, like Jeffrey himself, are positive, kind people.

Jeffrey and Charlie walk back to Jeffrey's house, where Jeffrey's father, An, is watering the garden outside the house. This garden, Charlie thinks, is one of the most beautiful sights in the town, and many of the townspeople visit it. Charlie finds the garden difficult to enjoy because he hates the insects that live there: bees, wasps, hornets, and more. Jeffrey and Charlie joke with each other about **Batman** and bees, and then part ways. Charlie notices that Jeffrey's father yells something angry and stern at Jeffrey, and Jeffrey stands very still.

Here we get a better picture of Jeffrey's life. Like Charlie, he has a sensitive, creative father, but one who also seems sterner and more assertive than Charlie's father. This shows how lucky Charlie is: he's given huge amounts of love and freedom by his parents, in stark contrast to both Jeffrey and Jasper Jones.

Charlie walks into his house. A short time later he sits down to dinner with his parents, and afterwards he goes to his room with *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. His father asks him if he's all right, but Charlie only says he feels like reading. In his room, Charlie finds it impossible to concentrate on anything but the sight of Laura Wishart. He wishes Jasper were there—it's not right, he thinks, that he should have to be alone. He notices a passage in his book about how courage is resistance to fear, not the absence of fear. He writes the quote in his notebook, and wonders why he can't force himself to be braver. He thinks that Jeffrey might be the bravest person he knows, even braver than Jasper.

This is an important passage, because it establishes two of Silvey's most important points about guilt and bravery. Guilt is a hard burden to bear, and many people find it immensely difficult to keep secrets—they need help from others to "carry the load." Thus, Charlie needs Jasper's help to carry the weight of Laura's death. Silvey also shows that bravery isn't a question of eliminating fear altogether. Even after Charlie recognizes that this point is true, however, he doesn't instantly mature—it'll take the entire novel for him to understand *the meaning of these words.*


Charlie looks through his notebooks. He finds the novel that he and Jeffrey wrote together last winter. Jeffrey was responsible for the action scenes, while Charlie was responsible for the plot and witty dialogue. The story concerned a Detroit detective named Truth who had to fight Joseph Stalin, who disguised himself as the Pope. Charlie often thinks about their novel, noting with amusement that one day he'll write a real book and go to Manhattan to become a real author.

In this novel within the novel, we see the differences between Charlie and Jeffrey. Jeffrey is younger, more immature, and more physically-minded. Charlie, by contrast, is more cerebral and serious. He's concerned with what the characters think, *not just what they* do. *We also see Charlie's fantasy life. He survives in Corrigan in part because he dreams of leaving, and the dreams give him strength and hope.*

Charlie suspects that his father is secretly working on a novel of his own. He goes to his library and stays there for hours with the door locked. The library used to be a bedroom for Charlie's younger sister, who died before she was born, nearly killing Charlie's mother and preventing her from ever having children again. Charlie wonders if his father would tell him about his writing if he told his father about his own.

Everyone in this novel has secrets, not just Charlie. Even Charlie's beloved father keeps some things from his loved ones. This suggests that secrets are an essential part of growing up. One develops an active inner life and learns how to keep this inner life from other people.

Charlie thinks about Eliza Wishart. He wonders if she's wondering where her sister is. Perhaps the police have already been called—perhaps they are investigating leads, drinking coffee, and planning what to do next. Charlie feels a deep sense of dread, and realizes that Jasper has led him to this feeling. He tries to think about Eliza, and imagines smelling her, holding her hand, and touching her waist. Yet as he imagines her warmth, it just reminds him of Laura.

Charlie shows more signs of being attracted to Eliza than he had previously. Even so, he continues to find Eliza a little repulsive, since she reminds him of the sight of Laura's corpse hanging from the tree. It will be some time before Charlie "works through" his feelings of disgust and gives in to his feelings of attraction.


CHAPTER 3

The day after he sees Jeffrey, Charlie wakes up and sees a large wasp on his window. He throws a copy of *The Naked and the Dead*, by Norman Mailer, at the wasp. The book misses its target, but causes the window to fall shut. Charlie wonders if he's banished the wasp, or just made it angry.

The wasp seems to represent Charlie's feelings of guilt and anxiety. He can "hide" or "banish" these feelings, just as he "banishes" the wasp, but this approach runs the risk of exacerbating his anxiety (or angering the wasp). The better approach, we'll come to see, is for Charlie to confront and work through his feelings.

Charlie enters the kitchen, where his parents are sitting. His mother tells him to stay in sight of the house if he spends time with Jeffrey. Charlie asks why, and in response, she only glares at him and says that she's his mother. Charlie is angry with his mother for always winning arguments. He's also angry that his father remains silent during these arguments. Charlie remains silent, and his mother takes this as an affirmation that he'll stay near the house.

Charlie's father has seemed like a reasonable person thus far, but he remains silent in this scene. This suggests that there's some tension between Charlie and his father. As much as he loves his father, Charlie wants him to be brave and assertive, thereby making himself admirable and setting a good example for Charlie himself.

Charlie sits at the kitchen table and reads the paper. There is news of the Vietnam War—more Australian soldiers are being shipped there to help the Americans. Charlie's father has wanted to protest the war, but Charlie's mother always tells him that it's a waste of time. Charlie wants his father to stand up to his mother and be brave.

Here we get another example of how Charlie's father conceals his true feelings. Charlie's frustration with his father seems perfectly legitimate—he should express his political convictions instead of always giving into his wife's advice.

After he reads the paper, Charlie walks to Jeffrey's house, where An Lu is still working on his garden. Charlie knocks on the door, and Jeffrey answers it, even though he almost never does so. Jeffrey explains that he's been grounded for swearing. Yesterday, Mrs. Sparkman was at the door when Jeffrey told his mother he was going to play "fucking cricket." Sparkman told Mrs. Lu what the word meant, and she grounded Jeffrey. Jeffrey isn't allowed to listen to the radio or go outside. He tells Charlie to go find Eliza, and teases Charlie for being "queer," which Charlie finds ridiculous.

This is a largely expository section, but it also shows us that Jeffrey has to deal with his parents' discipline in the same way that Charlie does. They both must accept their parents' authority, basically without question. It's also relevant that Jeffrey calls Charlie "queer." While the possibility is never seriously explained in the novel, there are strong homoerotic elements to Charlie's friendship with Jasper.

Charlie walks down the street, unsure where he wants to go. He passes by his school, where a few children are playing, and eventually arrives at the town library. It's empty except for the librarian, Mrs. Harvey. Charlie browses the fiction section, collects a pile of books, and goes to read them at a desk in the building. Most of the books are mysteries and thrillers. Charlie looks to see who has checked them out before, but he doesn't see Mad Jack's name, or any other names he recognizes.

Charlie proves that he is a resourceful and intelligent boy, and possibly capable of the task of investigating Laura's murder. He uses all the resources at his disposal—in this case, the town library (in the days before the internet, he has no other option). It's important that Charlie assumes that Mad Jack is an avid reader, too—Charlie assumes that everyone is just like him.

As Charlie looks through thrillers and mysteries, he remembers the Nedlands Monster, a criminal who was hanged last year, to the pleasure of everyone except Charlie's father. Charlie goes to the newspaper section of the library to find information about this subject. The Monster killed five people in one weekend three years ago. The culprit took two years to find. It turned out to be a quiet man with a harelip: Eric Edgar Cooke. Cooke stabbed a woman and shot several other people. As a child, his father had beat him, and throughout his life he was bullied for his cleft palate.

Charlie confronts more and more evil and horror as he tries to solve the mystery of Laura's murder. His willingness to continue with his research, knowing full well that it means more terror and discomfort, shows that he's committed to the truth, and to clearing his friend's name.

As Charlie reads about Cooke, he thinks about Jasper, with his alcoholic, physically abusive father, and other victims of bullying: Jeffrey; Prue Styles, a lonely girl with a birthmark; and Sam Quinn, a boy with a cleft palate. He wonders if all people have the capacity to commit murder if they're bullied and abused enough. He reads that Cooke's explanation for killing was simple: "I just wanted to hurt somebody." Cooke was executed on October 27, 1965.

Charlie is immature in many ways, but he shows great insight in the way he thinks about murder and crime. His analysis of guilt and innocence is neither totally deterministic (he doesn't think people are products of their environments) nor liberating (he doesn't automatically assume everyone who commits a crime is 100% personally responsible). This results in an ambiguous and sometimes frustrating—but balanced—view of guilt and innocence. It's also relevant that we learn here that the novel takes place in the 1960s. This situates the book in the era of the Vietnam War, the Mono Landing, and the Civil Rights Movement, all of which are important to understanding the novel's themes.

As Charlie examines the newspaper with a description of Cooke's execution, he notices another article, about the murder of a 16-year-old American girl named Sylvia Likens. Sylvia's mother and father worked at carnivals, and they were forced to pay to leave Sylvia, along with her younger sister, Jenny, in the care of a woman named Gertrude Baniszewski, since they couldn't afford to travel with her. Gertrude hated Sylvia and Jenny, especially because she had seven children of her own already. When Sylvia's parents didn't send Gertrude the money they'd promised, Gertrude began beating Sylvia, and telling her other children to hurt her too. They trapped Sylvia in their basement, where they forced her to eat her own urine and vomit. Sylvia told Jenny that she was going to die soon, and shortly afterward, she died of shock and starvation.

In this second story of crime, Charlie confronts even darker themes than he'd seen in the tale of Eric Edgar Cooke. Where Cooke killed adults, possibly in part because he'd been bullied throughout his life, Gertrude killed for no good reason—she seems to be a cruel, even evil woman. It's disturbing, too, that children helped Gertrude torture Sylvia. Perhaps this is Silvey's way of reminding us that even children are capable of crimes. Thus the children of Corrigan (including Jasper) are also suspects in Laura's murder.

As Charlie reads about Sylvia's death, he wonders why Jenny didn't tell someone about Sylvia sooner. Jenny wasn't being held in the basement, and she went to school—she could easily have told a classmate or a teacher what was happening to her sister. Charlie wonders how an entire community—all the people who heard Sylvia's cries and did nothing—could allow something so horrible to happen.

Charlie's thoughts on Sylvia and Jenny are immensely disturbing. It may be the case that ordinary people are capable of acts of great evil—and indeed, this has been the conclusion of psychologists for the last fifty years. At the time when the novel is set, Philip Zimbardo was finalizing his infamous experiments, in which ordinary people shocked and "killed" innocent people.

Charlie leaves the library and walks home, passing by the town bookstore. He tries to forget about Sylvia, but finds that he can't. Then he hears a voice, and realizes that it's Eliza asking him if he's all right. He forces a smile, knowing that it must look like a disgusting leer. Eliza smiles and laughs, and he thinks that she looks beautiful, like Audrey Hepburn. He tells her that he's been at the library, and adds that he's been reading. Eliza feigns surprise, and Charlie doesn't realize at first that she's being sarcastic. He's conscious that his wit and humor have left him altogether. He manages to tease Eliza about standing outside a bookstore, reading for free, and she smiles. Eliza asks Charlie to walk her home, and he nervously agrees.

Here, for the first time, Charlie shows his attraction to Eliza without any clear signs of being disturbed by her resemblance to Laura. It may be that Eliza is a pleasant relief after Charlie's dark, horrifying research into serial killers. It's also true that Eliza is Charlie's kind of person—smart, witty, and bookish. It's obvious, as least for the readers, that Eliza likes Charlie as much as Charlie likes her, but of course, this won't be clear to Charlie for some time.

Charlie walks Eliza home, frantically wondering what he should say, and whether or not he should hold her hand. He asks Eliza what book she bought at the bookstore, and she shows him a copy of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Eliza tells him that she dreams of living in Manhattan, and adds that she thinks Audrey Hepburn is brilliant and dignified. Charlie pretends to have seen many of Hepburn's films, but when Eliza asks him which ones, he can't name any without her help. Eliza seems to find this endearing.

There's a lot of dramatic irony in this scene. Charlie clearly thinks that he's messing up his date with Eliza because he's so awkward and tongue-tied. It's easy to see, however, that Eliza is attracted to Charlie, even though it's Charlie who narrates this scene. In much the same way that he pretended to be familiar with things—like booze and cigarettes—around Jasper, Charlie pretends to know Audrey Hepburn's work around Eliza.

As they walk, Eliza tells Charlie that her sister is missing. She adds that her mother can't stop crying, and that her father is drinking and yelling. Charlie notes that Eliza is very calm as she explains this, but he senses that she's secretly distraught. He considers putting his hand on her back, but he dismisses this gesture as "fake."

Charlie struggles to express genuine sympathy for Eliza, even when he's perfectly aware that she needs and deserve it. This shows that Charlie is far from mature—he has to train himself not only to feel the right emotions but also to communicate these emotions to other people. Of course, it doesn't help that he is hiding an enormous secret from Eliza this whole time.

Charlie and Eliza reach Eliza's house, where Eliza's mother, who is waiting outside, immediately yells at her for leaving the house without permission. Eliza insists that she asked her father if she could leave, and pretends that Charlie bought her the copy of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Eliza's mother irritably tells Charlie that he should leave. As he walks away, Charlie watches Eliza's mother pull her into the house. After he's walked a few blocks, Charlie realizes that Eliza knows something about her sister's disappearance.

Eliza seems like a skillful liar, as she instantly invents a story about Charlie giving her the copy of her book. In this sense, she seems and more clever and resourceful than Charlie himself, helping to explain why Charlie is so attracted to her. Despite the distance between Charlie and Eliza, Charlie does have the perception to realize that Eliza knows something about Laura's disappearance, and, more implicitly, that he and Eliza are going through a similar experience of suffering.

When Charlie returns to his house, his mother slaps him and calls to Charlie's father, whom she addresses as "Wesley," telling him that Charlie is all right. Charlie thinks that it's rare both for his mother to slap him and for her to call his father by his first name. Charlie's mother yells at Charlie for leaving sight of the house against her permission, and tells him that someone kidnapped Laura Wishart. She orders him to go his room, even after he swears and yells that there is a wasp in his room.

We hear Charlie's father's name for the first time in this scene. It's important that we know his name before we hear Charlie's mother's name. It suggests that like Charlie, our relationship with Wesley is closer and more intimate than our relationship with Charlie's mother.

Charlie goes to his room. He wonders what Norman Mailer would say to him—he'd probably call Charlie a "pussy," Charlie thinks. Before Charlie can do anything more, his mother walks in without knocking and orders him to come outside with her. Outside, she gives him a shovel and tells him to dig until she says to stop. Charlie complains that it's hot, and asks why he's being forced to dig at all. His mother simply tells him to keep digging, or she'll take his books. She goes back inside.

Charlie continues to measure himself against his literary heroes. More to the point, his literary heroes are hyper-masculine people like Norman Mailer (who not only wrote novels but also boxed, and once bit off part of an actor's ear in a filmed fight). We see Charlie's mother's pettiness and strictness here, but we don't have any more information about why she behaves this way than Charlie himself does.

Charlie angrily digs, silently cursing his mother and imagining throwing her into the hole he's digging. As he digs, he wonders what the hole could be used for—perhaps a tree. His mind jumps to Laura and Eliza, and he feels a strong desire to ask Eliza more questions about what she knows. He notices a large centipede in the dirt, and stops digging. At exactly this moment, his mother walks out and yells that he must keep working.

Charlie's mother proves herself to be insensitive to Charlie's fears and anxieties (about insects, at least). This helps to explain why Charlie dislikes her so much. Charlie also shows his active imagination. Even when he's hard at work, he can't help but think about everything that's happened to him so far.

Charlie continues digging and thinks about his mother. She has always hated Corrigan, he knows, but lately it seems as if her sarcasm and curtness have lost even the trace of warmth and kindness they once held. Everyone can see that she hates Corrigan, except for Wesley. She and Wesley moved to Corrigan shortly after they married. This fact suggests that they may have been shamed into eloping.

Here Silvey gives us more information about Charlie's mother and father. The fact that Charlie is thinking these things now suggests that he makes an effort to understand everyone, even the people he dislikes. Thus, he tries to see why his mother is so angry and sarcastic.

Charlie keeps thinking about his family. His mother comes from "old money," while his father's family lacks any money at all. His father was the youngest, and he showed great aptitude in school. His brothers, who had to drop out of school to work, wanted him to become a doctor or a lawyer—thus, they were disappointed when he said he wanted to study literature. Because Charlie's mother's parents didn't approve of Wesley, the couple eloped before his mother finished her degree. Wesley planned to become a novelist, but he never managed to finish a novel. Now, 13 years later, Charlie's mother is clearly bitter, especially after losing a daughter. Sometimes, she visits her family for weeks at a time, never announcing that she's leaving more than a day or two ahead of time. Charlie thinks that one day, his mother might not come back from her visits. Her family doesn't want her to stay married to Wesley, and they remind her of the wealthy lifestyle she left behind when she eloped. Charlie wonders about his mother's wealthy upbringing, and about how lucky he was to have a kind, loving father. Perhaps if Cooke had had a similarly easy life, he wouldn't have gone on to kill.

In a novel about coming of age, it's important that the protagonist measures his own progress against that of adults who have already lived most of their lives. Charlie's impressions of his parents' lives is pretty bleak, and it seems unlikely that either one of them will substantially change. As a result, Charlie's mother will continue to be unhappy and dissatisfied with Corrigan, while Wesley will continue to stoically endure, all while working on his novel. The difference between Wesley and Charlie's mother is that his mother has a life to return to—she could be wealthy and glamorous if she returned to her family. Again, Charlie proves that he has a gift for sympathizing with those who don't get much sympathy. Even a murderer like Cooke, he sees, is still a human being.

Charlie wonders what the hole he's digging could be for. After a few hours, he's dug to the depth of his thighs. He continues thinking about Cooke. It seems odd that after a lifetime of being abused by men, beginning with his father, Cooke would kill women. But perhaps this was because he wanted to become the people who bullied him—he wanted to take on the role of his own father.

Charlie's insight into Cooke's motivations explains a great deal, but not everything. It suggests that people can become the very thing they hate, but it doesn't do much to account for Cooke's specific actions—his choice of a weapon, his attacks on women, etc. There's a limit to how much understanding Charlie (or anyone) can achieve.

By the late evening, Charlie has dug a hole as deep as his ribs. Charlie's mother comes out of the house and surveys his work—Charlie thinks that she's secretly impressed with the huge hole he's dug. She tells him to stop digging, and then orders him to fill in the hole. Charlie is horrified and amazed by this command, and he refuses to obey. His mother yells at him that life is like digging a hole and filling it in: a lot of work for nothing. Charlie tells his mother that that's her life, not his. He curses her and tells her he'd like to bury her head in the hole. This infuriates his mother—she grabs the shovel and tells him to fill in the hole with his hands.

It's clear that Charlie's punishment is a reflection of the way his mother thinks about her own life. Based on what we've just learned about her, this seems like an apt metaphor. Charlie's mother has spent her adult life "digging holes"—creating problems for herself—which she must then repair. One can imagine that she is enormously unsatisfied with small-town life, as it gives her none of the opportunities she was used to with her family or in school.

A few hours later, Charlie is almost finished refilling the hole. Wesley walks into the yard and tells Charlie that he can stop digging. Charlie continues to dig, which leads his father to ask him why he's been acting so odd lately—he's usually a smart and reasonable kid. Charlie counters that he's almost fourteen, and thus not a kid anymore. His father tells him that he should have told them he was leaving the house, and adds that Charlie's mother was right to be worried. Charlie likes that his father talks to him like an equal, not a child.

Wesley's behavior with Charlie is markedly different than Charlie's mother's behavior. Wesley isn't afraid to tell Charlie that he was wrong, but he doesn't punish Charlie excessively. This suggests that he himself doesn't feel the same dissatisfaction with life that his wife feels—thus, he doesn't feel the need to take out his frustration on his son.

Wesley muses that the world is changing, and Laura's disappearance proves as much. He tells Charlie that his mother will tell Charlie that he's to go without dinner, but he advises Charlie to accept this information, and then eat food after Charlie's mother goes out to play bridge. He tells Charlie that Charlie's mother does a lot for him. Charlie replies that a maid could, too. Wesley reminds him that his mother wants him to respect her.

Wesley seems more in touch with the politics of the time than either Charlie or Charlie's mother. Wesley is concerned with Vietnam, racism, and the waves of violent, sexualized crime in Australia during the period the novel is set in. Charlie's observation about the maid suggests that his mother's interactions with him are cold and unemotional, little more than the mechanics of making coffee and food.

Wesley informs Charlie that he's spent the afternoon at the Miner's Hall, organizing a search party to look for Laura. Charlie is tempted to tell his father about Jasper and the river, but he remains silent. Wesley says that he's taught Laura in school, and believes that Laura has a troubled, volatile quality to her personality. He also acknowledges that he doesn't know anything about her home life. He guesses that Laura will turn up soon, having visited a friend or run off on her own. Charlie suggests that Laura is dead, but his father says that this is unlikely, though possible. He claps Charlie on the back and reminds him to accept the punishment his mother is about to give him.

In spite of his love for his father, Charlie hesitates to tell him about Jasper and Laura. This indicates that Charlie is a man of his word, and it's a sign that Charlie is more mature than he sometimes seems. We get the sense that Wesley knows Charlie is up to something, but it's impossible to tell if this derives from Wesley's thoughts or Charlie's own paranoia. Sometimes, Charlie's narrative perspective limits our knowledge of other characters.

A few hours later, Charlie's mother has left for bridge, and Charlie and his father are carefully cutting food so that Charlie's mother won't notice that he's eaten anything. As they do so, Charlie asks his father if he's writing in his library. Wesley jerks his head and replies that he just does his schoolwork and reading there. He says that novel writing should be left to novelists. Charlie nods, but when he goes off to his room, he wonders why his father is lying to him.

Wesley's behavior in this section seems almost childish. He's rebelling against his wife, just as Charlie does, but he is a grown man. It also reinforces the point that everyone has secrets: Wesley, Charlie, and even Charlie's mother herself (as we will later learn).

Alone in his room, Charlie notes that Jasper Jones has not come to his window that night. He wonders where the search party will look first. He also notices that his father's light is on in the study. This saddens Charlie, since it reminds him that his father lied to him about writing. Charlie contemplates writing a new novel, perhaps about Jasper Jones himself.

Charlie accepts that having secrets is an essential part of being an adult, so he can understand why Wesley hides his novel from him, even though this disappoints Charlie. Perhaps Wesley does this because writing is an intensely personal, private act for him.

Charlie sees an unfamiliar car pull up. He thinks that the car might belong to the police, and that they've come to arrest him. But then the door opens, and he sees his mother walking out, laughing. He wonders if she might be drunk. As she walks to the house, her face goes blank.

With the "unfamiliar car" we get an early sign that Charlie's mother may have secrets of her own. We also see that she is skilled at hiding these secrets—she can make her face "blank."

Charlie reads Mark Twain and feels himself falling asleep. He imagines himself talking to Eliza, saying all the right, witty things.

Charlie has fantasies about wooing Eliza, and it's unsurprising that his fantasies take a literary form: they're based on words, not actions.

CHAPTER 4

The day after he digs the hole, Charlie meets Jeffrey in the street to play cricket and listen to a cricket match on the radio. He tells Jeffrey about a nightmare he had last night about *The Wizard of Oz*, but he neglects to mention that he was dressed as Dorothy, or that his mother was the Wicked Witch, cackling at him. Jeffrey mentions that Laura is missing, and jokes about Charlie abducting her. Charlie is secretly nervous, but he manages to joke about the matter, and Jeffrey seems not to notice his discomfort.

Charlie's nightmare reinforces the obvious, which is that he dislikes his mother. At the same time, it also suggests that Charlie, like Dorothy, is a dreamer and a loner in a small, dull town. Charlie proves that, much like his parents, he can conceal his secrets and his feelings from other people, even his close friends.

Charlie bowls to Jeffrey, who easily hits everything he receives. After about half an hour of this, Charlie notices two low-flying airplanes above him. For a second, he imagines that the planes have come to arrest him. Although the cricket match is about to resume on the radio, Charlie tells Jeffrey he's going home. Jeffrey is confused, but says he'll talk to Charlie later. Charlie arrives home, where he notices that his father is out helping with the search for Laura. Charlie's mother asks if he wants lunch, and he politely says no.

Charlie's paranoia is on full display in this moment, as he imagines that the planes are there to take him away. We also get a flavor for Jeffrey's cricketing abilities, though we don't know exactly how talented Jeffrey is yet, because he has yet to be allowed to play in a competitive game. We see evidence that Charlie is growing up when he uses "diplomacy" on his mother, just as Wesley suggested.

A few hours later, Charlie hears a tapping at his window. Charlie is sure that it's Jasper, and so is surprised to see Jeffrey instead. Jeffrey is excited because his favorite cricketer, Doug Walters, did well in his first professional game. In the middle of the conversation, very casually, he tells Charlie that some of his family died yesterday. Charlie doesn't know what to say, but he asks Jeffrey what he means. Jeffrey explains that his uncle and aunt were killed in a bombing of the village where his mother grew up. Horrified, Charlie asks Jeffrey if he's all right. Jeffrey says that while he didn't know his aunt and uncle personally, he feels **sorry** for his mother, who can't stop weeping. He adds that his parents are trying to arrange for his cousins, aged twelve and four, to stay with them, even though this is highly difficult to do. In the meantime, his family is sending money to the people who are taking care of his cousins.

In this section, we get more of a sense of Jeffrey's inner life. So far, Jeffrey has been defined by his external qualities, or the lighter aspects of his personality—his athleticism, his humor, etc. Here, we see that Jeffrey deals with the same feelings as Charlie. Indeed, Jeffrey's optimism and cheerfulness are reactions—defense mechanisms, even—to the misery his family has experienced, and will probably continue to experience for many years. It's important that Silvey shows us that the Vietnamese are the victims of Australian soldiers, just as Australian soldiers are victims of the Vietcong. Jeffrey has just as much right to be angry with the townspeople as they do to be angry with him.

Charlie tells Jeffrey that he's **sorry** for his family's loss. Jeffrey mentions that his mother has begun saying "fuck," which causes both of them to laugh. They spend the rest of Jeffrey's visit talking about trivial things like toothpaste and men's nipples. Then Jeffrey says he has to go. Charlie senses that he should say something, but doesn't know what.

Jeffrey uses humor and jokes to fight his own depression and despair. In this sense, he relies on Charlie to cheer him up, as he needs a friend to bounce his jokes and insults off of. Charlie seems to feel exactly the same way about Jeffrey.

Later in the evening, Charlie sits and watches television with his father and mother. There is a news story about Laura's disappearance. Wesley expresses his surprise that Laura hasn't turned up yet. When Charlie asks him how the search has been, he mentions that Laura may have been meeting someone by the river. Charlie begins to panic, but before he can ask anything else, his mother tells Wesley that they shouldn't be discussing the matter in front of Charlie. Charlie angrily says that he deserves to know about Laura, and his mother tells Wesley that he and Wesley are exactly the same. She leaves the kitchen and slams her bedroom door behind her.

It's important that Wesley respects Charlie enough to tell him the truth about Laura, or at least part of it, while Charlie's mother refuses to allow Charlie to hear this information. Charlie's mother is very committed to the appearance of normality and stability—an obvious trend in Corrigan—while Wesley is not. Charlie's mother seems to be the one alienating herself from her husband and son, rather than vice versa, when she runs off to her room like an angry, bratty child.

Alone, Wesley reminds Charlie to be diplomatic, adding that he already tells Charlie more than enough about Laura. Charlie asks Wesley if he can come on the search party, but Wesley says that he can't under any circumstances. Charlie senses that Wesley is right in everything he's said, as usual.

Charlie respects Wesley's judgment, even if he initially disagrees with it, so he accepts that he shouldn't come on the search party.

In his room later that night, Charlie thinks about Vietnam, and wishes he'd asked his father about the matter. He realizes that the bombing in Vietnam seems like one of the least violent things that he's experienced lately. He also realizes that he wouldn't care so much about Vietnam if he weren't friends with Jeffrey, and this distresses Charlie.

Charlie confronts problems of morality that have confounded much wiser, older people. It's a fact that human beings care more about people they know than they do about strangers, but this is also an evolutionary necessity. Charlie doesn't arrive at any "solutions" to these moral problems. Rather, his new maturity seems to consist in recognizing them in the first place.

Charlie wonders what will become of Laura. Perhaps the search party will never find her body, and he and Jasper will never find out who killed her. Charlie wonders if he'll ever be able to forget Laura, or if her family will, if her killer isn't brought to justice. He concludes that it's impossible to be completely satisfied with an unsolved mystery. One always craves the truth, especially if it's about something as important as murder.

Charlie continues to crave the truth and to believe in the truth's power to restore order and righteousness to the world. At the same time, he's learning that truth by itself is sometimes ineffective in personal interactions. It's important to be honest, but also to be tactical—"diplomatic"—with information, calculating what its impact on other people might be.

Charlie gets in bed and thinks about Eliza. She is his only comfort when he's feeling anxious about Laura. He imagines the Wicked Witch from *The Wizard of Oz* melting into nothingness, and thinks that it would be interesting to experience death—it might even come as a relief.

Even if he doesn't understand what to make of Laura, Jasper, or Cooke, Charlie is committed to trying *to understand what goes on in their heads. This leads him to some unusual places, like trying to imagine what it would be like to experience death.*

CHAPTER 5

A week after Laura's death, Jasper Jones returns to Charlie's window. It is a week, Charlie notes, that feels as long as his entire life.

Charlie's perception of time changes dramatically in response to his experiences with Jasper. It's as if Laura's death is "slowing down" Charlie's development, making time pass more slowly.

In the remainder of the week leading up to Jasper's return, little happens. Jeffrey doesn't make the Country Week cricket team, which surprises no one, Charlie's mother is irritable, his father is calm, and Charlie himself finishes *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and moves on to *Innocents Abroad*. The search party continues, with no success, and various men from the town are drafted to fight in Vietnam.

Life goes on in Corrigan, despite Laura's disappearance. The usual themes of the town, such as racism, stoic acceptance of one's lot, or childish dissatisfaction, persist. This shows how Silvey has established the "rhythm" of the town in only four chapters.

The night that Jasper returns to Charlie's window, there is a town meeting at the Miners' Hall. The town chaplain and a few town council members take questions from the townspeople. For the most part, they say that they have no information or evidence about Laura's whereabouts. The most likely possibility, they suggest, is that Laura hitchhiked out of town.

As little progress as Jasper and Charlie have made with solving the mystery of Laura's death, the police have done no better.

In the vestibule of the Miners' Hall, Charlie notices Jeffrey with his parents. Charlie greets Jeffrey, and they agree that the police know nothing. In the middle of their conversation, there is a cry. Mrs. Lu has poured hot water into her teacup from an urn left for the townspeople to drink from. A woman named Sue Findlay sees her doing so, and angrily slaps the teacup from her hand, throwing scalding water onto Mrs. Lu's skin. Sue then yells profanities at Mrs. Lu, who is completely quiet and still. As she's about to grab Mrs. Lu's hair, some townspeople lead Sue away, leaving Jeffrey to lead his mother out of the building. He waves goodbye to Charlie, so casually that Charlie doesn't know how to respond. After Jeffrey and his mother leave, Charlie's parents talk to each other without mentioning what just happened to Mrs. Lu.

This confrontation shows the extent of the racism underlying the daily life of the town—a prejudiced status quo that here bubbles over into violence. This isn't only a conflict between angry schoolboys and Jeffrey—it extends to fully-grown adults who ought to know much better. Charlie's take on the scene seems much more sensible and mature than either of his parents' reactions. Where Wesley and Charlie's mother want to forget about what happened, Charlie refuses to do so. This shows the extent of his compassion for his friend and his friend's family, as well as his commitment to truth and justice.

As Charlie thinks about Mrs. Lu, he realizes what might happen to Jasper. If he's linked to the place where Laura was found hanging, then the townspeople, eager for any excuse, could lynch him. He imagines living with Eliza in New York, or living with Jasper in Brooklyn. At this moment, either option sounds wonderful to him.

Charlie's experiences with racism in the town make him better realize the urgency of his project to clear Jasper's name. At the same time, he survives his anxiety by retreating into fantasy, imagining his time in New York with Eliza.

On their drive home, Charlie's parents explain to him why Sue Findlay yelled at Mrs. Lu. Her husband, Ray, was killed in Vietnam, and her son was drafted to fight in the war. As Wesley explains all this, Charlie becomes angry—he says that it wasn't right that Sue accosted Mrs. Lu, or that no one helped Mrs. Lu afterwards. Wesley doesn't reply to this.

Wesley's silence is agonizing. Charlie wants him to speak out about Vietnam, to defend the innocent and attack the guilty. It's not clear exactly why Wesley remains silent, but based on what we've already seen, it seems likely that his wife has something to do with it.

That night, Charlie hears a tapping at his window. He opens the window and sees Jasper Jones, who has a black eye and a cut lip. He tells Charlie to follow him—although his parents haven't gone to bed yet, Charlie agrees, and climbs out the window.

Charlie seems more willing than usual to help Jasper here. In the past, he was highly reluctant to leave his home, but now he's ready to slip out, even when his parents are still awake.

Jasper leads Charlie down the street, careful to stay out of view of any cars. A car passes by, and they hide by the side of a house. To their dismay, the car parks at the house, and a man gets out. Luckily, the man is visibly drunk—he urinates in his garden, and staggers inside without seeing them. Charlie and Jasper walk away from the streets, toward the river. They don't say anything to each other.

This scene is lifted almost exactly from To Kill a Mockingbird. In Lee's novel, there's a moment where the main characters sneak out after dark and see a drunk man urinating in his front lawn. Silvey freely admits the extent to which he "borrows" from other authors, and from Lee more than any other.

Charlie and Jasper reach the glade where they found Laura. Charlie feels apprehensive as he remembers the sight of Laura hanging from the tree. Jasper tells Charlie that something is wrong—he senses that someone else has been to the glade recently. He insists that the police can't have found the glade yet, but Charlie notes that it sounds as if Jasper is trying to convince himself. Charlie asks Jasper if he has any whiskey, and Jasper hands him a small bottle, from which Charlie drinks. The whiskey tastes disgusting, but Charlie finds that it "works"—it makes him feel lighter and more relaxed.

Charlie's ability to drink the whiskey without retching—much—shows that he's made something like "progress." It's not clear what, exactly, this progress means, but it does suggest that he's acquiring the trappings of masculinity and maturity, if not their substance.

Charlie notices that Jasper has a black eye, and asks him if it was his father who gave it to him. Jasper shakes his head and tells Charlie that his father hasn't been in town since last Friday. Charlie suggests that Jasper's father might have killed Laura, but Jasper immediately disagrees—his father doesn't have it in him, he says. When Charlie presses him, Jasper explains that it was the local "Sarge" who hit him—the head of the local constabulary (police division). The police called Jasper in for questioning, assuming that Jasper had something to do with Laura's death, and then kept him locked up for the weekend. The police wanted Jasper to confess to Laura's crime, but Jasper kept silent, enduring pain in his ribs and back. Fortunately, Jasper explains to Charlie, Jasper now knows everything the police know about Laura's disappearance: nothing. While the police say that Laura may have hitchhiked out of the town, Jasper points out that this is highly unlikely, since Laura didn't take any clothes or other possessions. It's likely, he guesses, that the police are trying to pass on Laura's case to another town, making up for the fact that they've found no evidence. Jasper also tells Charlie that Laura's father, the president of the shire (the rough equivalent of a country in the United States), was present for his beating, and even kicked Jasper himself.

Based on what we've seen earlier in this chapter, it's entirely plausible that the police in Corrigan would arrest Jasper without sufficient evidence and then violently interrogate him. Charlie's growing awareness of the cruelty and racism of his fellow townspeople is, unfortunately, a vital part of his coming of age in the novel. He must first realize what he doesn't *want to grow up to be—a racist—before he can decide, realistically, what to make of his life. It's also in this section that Jasper introduces us to a new suspect in Laura's death—Laura's own father. Clearly, he's capable of cruelty to the young, meaning that he's as much of a suspect as any of the other racist adults Charlie has noticed in his community. The fact that Laura's father is the president of the shire indicates that racism is not only tolerated but boldly celebrated throughout Australia at the time.*

As they take swigs of whiskey, Jasper tells Charlie about Laura and their relationship. He's confident that Laura would never have left the town without Jasper—the two of them were planning to leave together. As Charlie takes a drink of whiskey, choking slightly, he thinks about Jasper, and how he's lost Laura, who was his love and possibly his best friend. Charlie realizes that Jasper pretends "he doesn't give a shit" to disguise his true sadness and loneliness. Charlie wonders if Jasper needs Charlie's help at all, or if he only wants someone to talk to.

We begin to get a better sense of Laura's relationship to Jasper, and thus a better understanding of Laura herself. Like Charlie, she saw something attractive in Jasper's rugged, ambitious personality. At the same time, Charlie begins to sense that this persona is an illusion, and underneath, Jasper is terrified and lonely. This is why he enlists Charlie's help in the first place.

Jasper tells Charlie that he's sure Mad Jack Lionel killed Laura. Mad Jack saw Jasper with Laura many times, and he's killed before. Jasper has passed by Mad Jack's house many times, and every time, Mad Jack yells at him. Jasper acknowledges that he doesn't know for sure if Mad Jack is talking to Jasper or not—he can't understand what he's saying. Jasper says that he's planning to sneak into Mad Jack's house to find evidence proving his guilt. Charlie protests that he's unlikely to find any evidence at all, and adds that it's possible that Mad Jack had nothing to do with the crime, anyway. Jasper admits that he doesn't know much about Mad Jack. His father told him that he killed a woman years ago, but Jasper doesn't know who this woman was, or why Mad Jack killed her.

Mad Jack seems like a possible suspect in this case, but he's almost too obvious a culprit. The fact that Jasper doesn't exactly understand what Jack is yelling to him suggests that there's much more to Jack than meets the eye, which in turn this suggests that Jack isn't the guilty party he seems to be. It also doesn't help that Jasper's only information about Jack being a murderer comes from a highly unreliable source—Jasper's own alcoholic father.

Jasper tells Charlie about what he and Laura had been doing in the days leading up to her death. Jasper hadn't seen Laura in a few days, because he'd been selling fruit to make money so that he and Laura could leave Corrigan. Perhaps Laura walked by Mad Jack's house by herself on the way to the glade, and that was when Mad Jack killed her. Jasper blames himself for Laura death—if he hadn't been selling fruit, he could have protected Laura. Charlie asks Jasper what he means by "protect," but Jasper doesn't respond. Charlie senses that Jasper is concealing something from him, but he can't guess what this might be. He tries to reason his way through the facts, as Atticus Finch would do. It's a simple explanation that Mad Jack, the town recluse, killed Laura—but perhaps it's too simple and too convenient.

Here, Silvey complicates our understanding of innocence and guilt. It seems likely that Jasper's absence is "responsible" for leading to Laura's death, but this doesn't exactly mean that Jasper is guilty. Nevertheless, it does help to explain why Jasper is feeling so guilty about Laura's hanging—he knows that he should have been there for her. It's also notable that Charlie rejects Mad Jack's guilt as "too convenient"—even when he's investigating a murder, Charlie approaches things with a literary instinct, and he looks for the best story.

Jasper tells Charlie something Laura once told him. There have been more than 100 billion human beings in the history of the planet—thus, for any one human being to think that he owns a part of the Earth, or is better than other humans, is absurd. He adds that it's absurd to "draw lines" and invent complicated rules to live by, as religious people do. Charlie isn't sure how to reply, but he tells Jasper that in India, people used to believe that the Earth was suspended on the back of a turtle. Jasper smiles and laughs at this. He tells Charlie that there is no such thing as God, just as there's no such thing as Zeus or Apollo. What's important, he explains, is to trust oneself and "have faith" in one's abilities. Jasper senses that if anything, God is "inside him." He longs for the future, when humans will be able to explore the moon and other planets.

Jasper's long speech about religion is complicated, but it includes a number of points that Silvey has already alluded to. To begin with, he mentions the futility of "boundaries" of any kind. This corresponds to the boundaries that the town of Corrigan imposes: the petty ways of classifying races and people. Jasper's conclusions about religion are personal as he rejects organized ideology of any kind. This worldview is rather"existentialist": one must determine one's own thoughts and beliefs instead of submitting to other people's dogma. In a way, this scene is the height of Jasper's charisma, where he is truly the kind of ambitious, adventurous character Charlie has read about in books. Jasper's ambition is virtually boundless—he even wants to explore the moon.

Charlie asks Jasper about his mother, who was an Aboriginal. Jasper tells Charlie that he barely knew his mother, since she died in a car accident when he was young. Thus, he doesn't know anything about Aboriginal religion. Jasper mentions that his father used to be an excellent football (soccer) player, but he preferred to drink and be miserable than pursue a career as an athlete.

Jasper's explanation of his parents' lives is short, and though it contains plenty of information, it does little to better Charlie's understanding of either one of them. This shows that information has its limits—one can "know" a great deal about a family without fully "understanding" it.

As Jasper speaks, Charlie feels his vision blurring and his body numbing. He vomits up the whiskey he's drunk. As Charlie crouches on the ground, he notices a carving on the tree from which Laura was hung. At first, he thinks the whiskey is making him see things that aren't there. But then he walks to the tree and realizes that there is indeed a carving. He calls Jasper over, and they look at the word together: "**Sorry**." Charlie can see from Jasper's face that he didn't carve the word.

Charlie's vomiting seems to confirm his lack of machismo, but in actuality, it's the same action we've already seen from Jasper. More to the point, it provides a useful piece of information—the word "sorry," scrawled on the tree. Though we're only halfway through the novel, it seems as if the mystery is becoming more, not less, complicated. There seems to be someone else who knows about Laura's death, someone who's still living in the town.

Jasper and Charlie walk back to Corrigan, thinking about the carved tree. Charlie doesn't know how to interpret the "**Sorry**"—it is an apology for Laura, for Laura's family, or for Jasper? Charlie realizes that whoever carved the word is still in Corrigan, and knows about Jasper's glade. As Charlie thinks about this, he and Jasper pass by Mad Jack's house, and Charlie feels a sense of dread.

In spite of his skepticism of Mad Jack's guilt, Charlie continues to be afraid of him. This shows that rational thought can only go so far, as Charlie's fears and anxieties that influence his reasoning. It's impossible for him to be as cool and impartial as his hero, Atticus Finch.

Charlie and Jasper walk back through the center of town, staying off the main streets to avoid the cars of the search party. At several points, they're forced to crouch in drainage ditches to hide from police cars. Just as Charlie turns the corner toward his house, he and Jasper see that there is a search party on his lawn, and both his mother and father are there. Jasper whispers to Charlie to make something up, and not to mention Jasper. With this, he slips away, leaving Charlie to deal with his parents.

Jasper abandons Charlie to deal with his parents. While this is clearly the sensible thing to do—it'll be worse for both of them if Charlie's parents see that he's involved with Jasper—the act feels like a kind of betrayal. Charlie was attracted to Jasper because he considered himself Jasper's friend and partner. Here, it becomes clear that Charlie is on his own.

Charlie walks toward his house, slowly, knowing that he's a "dead man walking." As he approaches, his mother runs toward him, weeping, and embraces him. As his mother hugs him, Charlie realizes for the first time that it's terrifying not knowing where one's family is. He thinks of Eliza not knowing where Laura is, and feels deep sympathy for his mother. Still holding his mother, Charlie begins to cry.

Even though he dislikes some of the things his mother does, Charlie still loves her and can empathize with her. In part, this is a testament to his own innate potential for sympathy. At the same time, it also proves that Wesley's advice that Charlie should be diplomatic has paid off—he's learned to be gentler and kinder with his mother.

As he hugs his mother, Charlie looks around and sees that Wesley and a large crowd have gathered. Keith Tostling, a sheep shearer, grabs Charlie and inspects his eyes as if he's a doctor—Charlie finds this ridiculous, and shakes loose. Wesley ruffles Charlie's cowlick and says, "Whoa, easy, sport." Charlie has never loved his father more than right now.

Even in the midst of this poignant moment, Silvey gives us traces of humor. The fact that a sheep shearer thinks he's qualified to treat eye problems reminds us that it's not all mystery and tragedy. Charlie's love for his father also helps to redeem the sad, uncertain note of this chapter.

The "Sarge" tells Wesley that he'd like to speak with Charlie, and Wesley nods. Charlie, Wesley, and Charlie's mother walk to their home, followed by the Sarge. Charlie notices that An Lu is returning to his house, looking very grave. Charlie thinks that An Lu—and everyone in town—is judging him very poorly, and he feels ashamed. With this in mind, he resolves to leave Corrigan as soon as the "mess" with Laura is over.

It comes as a surprise that in the instant that Charlie expresses such great emotion for his mother and father, he also resolves to leave Corrigan. This suggests that his desire is partly based in momentary embarrassment, as well as a longing to escape and start over new somewhere else.

CHAPTER 6

For sneaking out of the house, Charlie's parents "sentence" him to his room until the New Year. Charlie resumes his story on Boxing Day, shortly after Jeffrey has been made "twelfth man" for the cricket team. Jeffrey won this position because the team needed an errand runner, not because of his talent. Because Jeffrey will be playing on Boxing Day, Charlie's parents let him out of his room to watch.

This chapter begins on a comic note, with the word "sentence" being amusingly overstated. It also opens with an optimistic tone, since Jeffrey has achieved a longtime goal by making the cricket team. Charlie's parents know how important Jeffrey is to Charlie, so they let Charlie go to his cricket match.

Charlie's narrative jumps back to the night his parents found him missing. After Charlie returned, he walked into his home with the Sarge and his parents. The Sarge sat down with Charlie and asked him questions. His first question was whether Charlie had been with Jasper Jones. In that instant, Charlie discovered that he enjoyed lying. He told the Sarge that he was "fond" of Eliza Wishart, and that he'd wanted to go see her, in order to comfort her. To Charlie's surprise, the Sarge accepted his lie. Charlie added that he'd been unable to make it to Eliza's, and so he returned to his house, trying to avoid the search cars. As he told this lie, Charlie began to enjoy himself.

Charlie discovers that he's not only capable of lying—he's also good at it. He's maturing in a new way now, and has learned to deal with his anxiety about Laura by using words and stories as defenses. More than ever, Silvey suggests that lying and secret-keeping are a part of growing up. Only when one carries secrets, and learns how to conceal them, does one gain the necessary maturity to call oneself an adult. At the same time, there's undeniably something childish and amusing about seeing Charlie, a boy, lie to the Sarge.

After Charlie finished his story, the Sarge told Charlie that he was "a lucky boy," and that he couldn't keep sneaking out, even to help Eliza. Charlie marveled that this calm, fatherly person was the same Sarge who beat Jasper Jones.

The Sarge's "double life" (his ability to be kind to Charlie and cruel to Jasper) underscores the level of racism in Corrigan, as well as the importance of "double lives" to all the people of Corrigan: everyone has secrets to hide.

After the Sarge left the house, Charlie's parents told him that he'd be grounded until the end of the year. Afterwards, Charlie's mother yelled at Wesley, accusing him of being a neglectful father who didn't pay attention to his own wife or child, or care about their feelings. Charlie was surprised that his mother would accuse his father of any of these things, since it wasn't his father that Charlie snuck out with. Charlie thought that his mother was using the incident as an opportunity to tell Wesley the things she'd been thinking for years.

While Charlie has been learning to deal with his thoughts and feelings by controlling them and keeping them secret, his mother has become less and less capable of doing the same. Clearly, she's harboring years of resentment, and can't help but let it out. While keeping secrets is a part of growing up, it's not always something healthy or useful, so in one sense, Charlie's mother is finally being honest with herself and her family.

As Charlie's mother yelled at Wesley, Wesley remained calm and quiet. Charlie's mother said that Corrigan was destroying her life and harming her family. Wesley responded by addressing Charlie's mother as Ruth. He told Ruth that there were "things" she thought he didn't know, but he did. With this, Wesley told Ruth and Charlie to go to bed, adding that he was very angry with Charlie, and that they'd talk later. Ruth yelled that Wesley and Charlie talked about her behind her back, blaming everything on her. In response, Wesley only told Ruth to go to bed again. As Charlie walked to his room, he noticed how sad and tired his father looked.

Wesley's hint that he "knows things" about Ruth is an early clue to what Ruth does with her time alone in Corrigan—although one can already probably guess what's going on. Throughout the entire exchange, Silvey is careful to portray Wesley as the victim, never the aggressor. Wesley behaves calmly and coolly, emphasizing Ruth's childish anger. Charlie gains enormous respect for his father in these situations, and he also gets a model of civility to which he can aspire.

For the next few weeks, Charlie spent much of his time reading the newspaper for news of Laura. There was almost no news of her, and gradually the columns on her disappearance became shorter, until there were none at all. Charlie only went outside to do chores in his backyard, but he "escaped" into the worlds of books. His favorite book that he read during this time was Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, whose protagonist reminded him of Jasper. Charlie also thought about Eliza during his time indoors—he wished he could comfort her, and smell her.

Charlie uses literature—both reading and writing—to escape from his sense of confinement. There is something highly mature about this form of escape. Whereas Ruth and Jasper fantasize about physical departures from Corrigan, Charlie uses fiction to work through his desire for escape without actually planning to escape. This is an extremely important distinction to keep in mind, especially in the second half of the book.

During his grounded period, Charlie spent long hours writing. He daydreamed about living in Manhattan with Eliza, talking about his latest novel with Ernest Hemingway.

Charlie's fantasies of success are indistinguishable from his fantasies of love and sex. In a way, both fantasies are versions of the same thing—Charlie's desire to grow up as soon as possible.

The narrative catches up to the present, and on Boxing Day Charlie walks to the cricket courts, savoring "the thrill of being outside." As he arrives at the courts, he sees that Jeffrey is playing. Charlie runs up to the sidelines to talk to Jeffrey, who explains that he's subbing out for Jim Quincy, another player, who has appendicitis. Jeffrey is overjoyed to be playing, and thinks that the team might let him bowl. Charlie notices that there is a large crowd watching the game.

Despite the barriers that exist to prevent Jeffrey from playing cricket, his optimism and persistence seem to have paid off, and he's finally been given a chance to play. Sometimes it's better to prepare for the best than to deny that the best will ever happen.

An opponent of Jeffrey's team hits the ball in Jeffrey's direction, and he runs after it, looking to catch it. Charlie watches as Jeffrey runs as fast as he can, but he misses the ball, and the crowd groans. Warwick Trent, also on Jeffrey's team, is angry, and calls Jeffrey "Cong." Jeffrey runs back to his position, where he and Charlie quietly laugh and make fun of Warwick. Jeffrey asks Charlie bizarre questions—if he'd rather wear a hat made of spiders or have penises for fingers. Charlie laughs, and the two friends "trash talk" each other.

In part, Jeffrey's initial failure is clearly because he's "rusty"—if he'd been allowed to play cricket all season, he'd definitely be better. This is an insightful point about racism and "equal opportunity" —in order for the privileged to understand the disadvantaged's performance in all walks of life, they must also understand their background and the disadvantages they've grappled with in the past.

The cricket match continues, and the opposing team, from Backburn, does well, scoring many points against Corrigan. Toward the end of the game, Warwick Trent goes to bowl against the opposing team. Charlie angrily thinks that he should use Jeffrey, whose bowling skills are excellent. Instead, Charlie notes, Jeffrey is forced to stand and watch—on his one chance to impress the cricket team, he's barely allowed to play.

Charlie takes the cynical view of affairs, concluding that Jeffrey will never get to play cricket again. Jeffrey, we can assume, thinks nothing of the kind—he continues to remain optimistic, hoping for another chance to bowl or hit. Charlie's approach hasn't been very successful so far, so we're inclined to side with Jeffrey.

Charlie notices that Eliza is watching the game from a hill. She waves to him, and he waves back. Jeffrey teases Charlie and urges him to talk to Eliza. Charlie walks forward to Eliza, nervously trying to think of something clever to say to her. Eliza invites him to sit with her on the hill, and as he sits down, he notes that she smells wonderful. Charlie and Eliza talk playfully about living in New York, and Charlie gives her an awkward compliment about how he'd wait all day to see her. Eliza blushes.

Here, it becomes clear to Charlie that Eliza likes him (something that was already clear to the reader!). Charlie no longer regards Eliza with horror, associating her with her dead sister. This suggests that, although he's still traumatized by the sight of Laura's corpse, he has found ways to cope with it and move on with his life.

Eliza and Charlie watch the cricket match, and Charlie secretly rejoices whenever Warwick Trent misses a hit. Eliza compliments Charlie's shirt, and Charlie compliments her dress. Then, unexpectedly, Eliza mentions Laura. She tells Charlie that her father acts like Laura never existed. She begins to cry, and Charlie, after much thought, gives Eliza his handkerchief. Eliza tells Charlie that her family—except for her father—still acts like Laura could return at any time. Charlie feels an urge to tell her what he knows about Laura, but he keeps quiet. Eliza asks Charlie to make her laugh, and Charlie asks Eliza the question Jeffrey asked him: "Would you rather wear a hat made of spiders or have penises for hands?" Eliza laughs and chooses the penises. Charlie tells her he chose the same thing.

In this section, Silvey stops depicting Eliza as an unattainable ideal, and humanizes her. She's just like Charlie in many ways: vulnerable, nervous, and intelligent. She also shares a childish sense of humor with Charlie and Jeffrey—a welcome moment of humor in an otherwise serious passage of the novel. Silvey shows that humor and laughter are important tools for fighting depression and trauma. By telling stories and being creative, Jeffrey, Charlie, and now Eliza overcome their complicated emotions and bond with one another.

As the game goes on, Charlie asks Eliza more silly questions, and she continues to laugh. They notice that it's the Corrigan team's turn to bat, and Jeffrey is up. The bowler, who obviously thinks little of Jeffrey because he's short and Asian, bowls, and Jeffrey hits the ball out of bounds, ending the game with a win for Blackburn. Just as the teams are about to shake hands, the umpire yells that the bowler was over the line—Jeffrey has another chance to hit. The bowler throws the ball, and it hits Jeffrey's shoulder. The Corrigan team laughs at this. On the bowler's next pitch, Jeffrey hits the ball far enough to achieve four runs. The crowd is so surprised that there is no applause, only silence. On Jeffrey's next hit, he scores another four runs. He continues to score points on the increasingly irritated Blackburn team, and Eliza tells Charlie that she had no idea Jeffrey was so talented.

In this section (which is full of cricket terminology that may be difficult for Americans to understand), Jeffrey proves that he's an enormously capable and talented cricket player. This proves what we already knew—the townspeople of Corrigan were holding him back from his athletic abilities, refusing to let him play or practice. Jeffrey also proves that his small stature can be an asset in athletic play, as it allows him to maneuver quickly past the other players. This suggests that there are ways to distinguish oneself athletically in Corrigan without being a huge bully, like Warwick Trent.

There is a short break in the game, with Jeffrey still up to bat. The Corrigan team brings Jeffrey a drink, and Charlie realizes that they've begun to grudgingly respect Jeffrey. Jeffrey returns to bat, looking neither nervous nor intimidated. A new bowler bowls to Jeffrey, and he hits three impressive hits in a row. Children, mothers, and fathers all pay special attention to Jeffrey—even if they don't care about cricket, they can sense that he's an extremely talented player. On his next hit, Jeffrey fails to "take the strike," meaning that he has only one "set" of hits left before he's no longer at bat. The Corrigan coach calls a time out, and although he has no idea what the score of the game is, Charlie can tell from the urgency with which the coach talks to Jeffrey that it must be very close.

Jeffrey has begun to earn the loyalty of his teammates—the same teammates whom just minutes ago called Jeffrey insulting, racist names. Here Silvey shows that minorities can sometimes "earn" the respect and even the admiration of racists by distinguishing themselves in various ways. There's nothing fair about this process, however, as whites certainly don't have to distinguish themselves to non-whites in the same way. On a purely technical level, it's impressive that Silvey builds suspense, even for American readers who are largely unfamiliar with the athletic terms of cricket.

Jeffrey returns to bat for his final set of hits, and Eliza grips Charlie's hand with excitement, much to Charlie's delight. When the bowler throws the ball, Jeffrey runs instead of hitting, in an attempt to score one quick point. The bowler illegally stands in front of Jeffrey's path, and the crowd howls at the "injustice." Charlie realizes that Jeffrey has quietly won over his audience—they're on his side. The umpire reprimands the bowler for blocking Jeffrey's run, and Jeffrey returns to bat.

Jeffrey has been so successful as a cricket player in this match that he's won over the entire crowd, not just his teammates. Even the umpire takes Jeffrey's side (versus what we've seen in the past, where the referees are biased against Jeffrey, even when other players commit fouls against him).

On his next hit, Jeffrey scores two runs, and his teammates encourage him. One teammate calls him "Cong," but he means it as a nickname instead of an insult. On the next few bowls, the bowler throws difficult, steeply bouncing bowls that the audience regards as illegal. Charlie realizes that Jeffrey is down to the last bowl of the inning, and that Corrigan must be within a few points of a victory. Eliza moans that she can't watch, and the crowd and Corrigan team yell encouragement to Jeffrey. On his final hit, Jeffrey manages to hit the ball past the outfielders, scoring four runs and winning the game for Corrigan.

This section shows the limits of Jeffrey's quest to earn respect for himself. He "transforms" his racist nickname into a term of approval—but the fact remains that his nickname, "Cong," is still insulting and dehumanizing. Even so, it's impressive to see Jeffrey field difficult bowls and win the game. One gets the sense that Jeffrey isn't trying to earn respect at all, but just wants to play the game he loves and win. The respect comes as a byproduct.

When Jeffrey wins the game for Corrigan, the crowd explodes with applause. Jeffrey's teammates, even Warwick Trent, slap him on the back and congratulate him. As the players walk out of the court, someone carries Jeffrey's bag for him.

The evidence of Jeffrey's success is very clear here. At the beginning of the game, Jeffrey had to carry other players' bags, but now they carry his.

Eliza and Charlie watch the players walk off the field. Eliza tells Charlie a secret: she's been walking by the bookstore for the last two weeks, hoping to run into Charlie. She reveals that she heard that Charlie tried to visit her, and that he was grounded as a result. She calls Charlie sweet, and kisses him. Charlie struggles to describe the kiss—in the end, he concludes that there are no words for it.

Eliza's clearly attracted to Charlie, and her attraction is at least partially based on her awareness that he is attracted to her. It's amusing that Charlie's lie about sneaking off to see Eliza has paid off so grandly for him.

Charlie and Eliza continue to kiss on the hill. Suddenly, a voice calls out, and Charlie and Eliza turn—it's Jeffrey, running up the hill with a huge smile on his face. Jeffrey brags good-naturedly about his hits, and Charlie, instead of trash-talking back, tells Jeffrey that he was incredible. Eliza mentions the penis-fingers question, and she and Jeffrey bicker playfully. Then, Jeffrey asks Charlie for a ride home, pointing to Wesley, who's standing near the cricket courts. Charlie wonders if Wesley saw him kissing Eliza, and if he'll be angry. Eliza says goodbye to Charlie, and walks away from the hill.

Even in his moment of greatest triumph—having kissed Eliza—Charlie is still very much a child, worrying needlessly that his father will be angry that he's kissed a girl. It's important to measure Charlie's progress gradually. Even though he's grown a great deal since the beginning of the novel, he has a long way to go before he reaches anything like total maturity.


Jeffrey and Charlie walk to Wesley's car, laughing about Superman and Lois Lane, as they usually do. In the car, Wesley congratulates Jeffrey and mentions that he ran into Pete Wishart, Eliza's father, who was drunk, but had seen Jeffrey play and was eager to praise him. Wesley tells Charlie, wryly, that Pete "didn't see anything else," and Jeffrey laughs. Wesley smiles and winks at Charlie.

It's obvious that Wesley doesn't mind that Charlie kissed Eliza, so Charlie's fear was childish and unsubstantiated. At this stage in the novel, Pete Wishart seems like a harmless, even comical alcoholic, but it's still disturbing that such a man could serve as the president of anything, much less an entire shire.


The evening after Jeffrey's cricket victory, Jeffrey, Charlie, and Charlie's parents eat dinner together. Jeffrey recounts his hits, but neither Charlie nor Ruth pays much attention. Charlie can't help thinking about Eliza, and Charlie's mother seems lost in thought. Charlie makes eye contact with Wesley, and he reminds himself to be diplomatic. Instead of complaining to his mother, he compliments her on her cooking. Charlie wonders if his father knows he lied about sneaking out to see Eliza. He also wishes Jasper Jones would come by tonight—he wants to tell him about kissing Eliza.

Here we see how much progress Charlie has made with lying and diplomacy. As he acknowledges in this section, there's a pleasure simply in the act of lying. Charlie's secrets are getting more and more complicated. One sign of his maturity is that he's eager to tell Jasper about kissing Eliza, because it means that Charlie is closer to the kind of maturity Jasper has already embodied by dating Laura Wishart.


Between the night Charlie was caught sneaking out and Boxing Day, Jasper has visited Charlie twice. The first time, a few days after Charlie is caught, Jasper comes with the news that he's found proof that Jack Lionel was responsible for Laura's death. Charlie sits by his window, whispering to Jasper. Jasper explains that he snuck into Jack's house and explored his shed, kitchen, and garden. Near the garden, Jasper found an old, rusty car—inside the car, he saw the word "**Sorry**" etched deep into the rust.

Jasper's discovery seems to implicate Mad Jack, but once again, the lack of certainty makes us suspicious that Jack is guilty. Like Charlie, we're dissatisfied with the evidence because it's "too neat." In addition, Silvey has already made it clear that many people feel a desire to apologize to others—this is a clue that either "sorry" could have been written by any number of people other than Jack.

Charlie isn't sure what to make of Jasper's news. Jasper seems certain that Mad Jack is responsible for Laura's murder. At the same time, Charlie recognizes that, like Atticus Finch, he should weigh all the evidence carefully. Charlie asks Jasper why the police haven't visited Mad Jack's house yet, if he's such a likely suspect. Jasper replies that the police are incompetent. He adds that Jack caught him on his property. As Jasper was leaving, he saw Jack sitting on his back porch, yelling, "I knew it were you!"

Jasper's charisma continues to persuade Charlie to believe him, but Jasper's answers, when read on the page, seem strikingly insubstantial. He's sure that Mad Jack is responsible for Laura's murder, but he's never refuted the most basic objection to this hypothesis, which Charlie named at the beginning of the book—that Jack is too old to climb a tree and hang a young girl.

Before Charlie can question Jasper further, he hears three knocks at his door—it's his mother. Jasper quickly runs away, and Charlie closes his window and unlocks his door. Ruth walks in and looks around suspiciously. Charlie thinks that by sneaking out, he's embarrassed his mother—her reputation in the town is no longer that of a perfect parent with a perfect child. Charlie takes snide pleasure in ruining Ruth's reputation in this way. Shortly afterwards, Ruth closes the door and leaves Charlie alone.

Charlie has now become more conscious of others' emphasis on the appearance of normality. Even after he's grown to develop his own secrets (and create his own false appearances), he continues to believe that the truth ultimately triumphs. Thus, Charlie plans to lie about Laura for a short time before finally revealing the truth.

It has been three nights since Charlie last saw Jasper, he writes. Tonight, he is writing in his notebooks. Almost without thinking, he writes, "**sorry**," on the paper, and then begins to write a story to accompany the word. As he writes, Charlie thinks that "sorry" is one of the noblest things to say—it takes genuine maturity even to say the word to another. "Sorry" can be sarcastic, but it can also be a gesture of humility, or a gift from one person to another. Even as he thinks this, Charlie begins to doubt himself. Perhaps "sorry" isn't much of a gift at all—it's like an empty box, promising much but ultimately delivering nothing.

Charlie reaches a frustrating but balanced conclusion—barely even a conclusion at all—about apologies. Apologies can be either sincere or insincere, sympathetic or heartless. They can reflect the apologizer's emotion or lack thereof. None of this is new information, either for us or for Charlie. Still, there is something impressive about Charlie's ability to remain "on the fence" about such matters, rather than instinctively take a strong opinion, like Jasper or Ruth.

Charlie writes a poem for Eliza. The poem explains that a tree doesn't know how beautiful it is, and doesn't recognize when others appreciate its beauty. The poem ends, "I'm glad you're not a tree." After he writes it, Charlie imagines living in Manhattan and talking to writers like Jack Kerouac, Truman Capote, and Ken Kesey.

Charlie again shows that his romantic and creative interests are closely linked. We've already seen plenty of evidence that this is the case. For example, his dreams of living in New York always end with visits to see Eliza.

As he sits in bed and thinks about his literary heroes, Charlie hears a loud noise coming from outside. He goes to the living room, looks out the window, and sees a group of four men outside Jeffrey's house, destroying An Lu's prized garden. An Lu runs outside and, with surprising calmness, asks the men what they're doing. The men hit An, and he falls to the ground. Charlie sees Jeffrey and Mrs. Lu running outside—at this point, Charlie yells for his dad. Wesley comes out of his room, followed by Ruth, and, when he sees what's going on, he runs outside to protect An.

This is a heartbreaking scene, because it shows the limits of Jeffrey's ability to fight against racism on his own. Even after he proves that he's an excellent cricketer (a skill the town greatly values), Jeffrey still remains a "gook"—meaning that his entire family is targeted and attacked for their race. It's even possible that his athletic prowess is what brought about this attack on his father. Ending racism is the responsibility of the racists, not those being discriminated against. At the same time, it's inspiring to see Wesley rush to An's defense without any hesitation.

Wesley takes on the four men attacking An, skillfully ducking their punches. Charlie notes with pride and surprise that Wesley is the strongest and tallest man outside. As Wesley wrestles the men, Harry Rawlings, a neighbor and strong, athletic truck driver, joins in and helps him, and together they easily push the assailants to the ground. Roy Sparkman, another neighbor, runs from his house to the scene, and notices that the four assailants have a truck parked outside the Lus' house. Roy takes the keys from the ignition. The youngest of the four men breaks away from Wesley and Roy and runs into the night. Maggie Sparkman, Roy's wife, yells after the man, addressing him as James Trent.

This is a turning point in the novel, because it shows that Corrigan has plenty to be proud of, even when one considers the racism and anti-intellectualism previously on display there. It's not just Wesley, in other words, who rushes to defend An—it's everyone who lives near the Lus' house. There are still some good, honest people in Corrigan, and plenty of them. It's also notable that James Trent shares a last name with Warwick, so it's likely that he's Warwick's father or brother—possibly explaining where Warwick picked up his racist bullying.

Three assailants now lie on the ground, along with An Lu. Wesley, Charlie, Harry, and Roy stand on the lawn. Jeffrey runs toward one of the assailants, angrier than Charlie has ever seen him. Before he can attack the man, Harry grabs him and holds him back. Wesley asks Charlie to take Jeffrey inside, but Charlie thinks that he'll never succeed—they both have to watch what happens.

One of the most poignant moments in this scene is Jeffrey's anger. Previously, Jeffrey was always happy and lighthearted, but here, he's the first to seek revenge against the people who tried to hurt his father. His desire for revenge seems perfectly reasonable, but it's all the more moving because we've never seen him get angry before.

The oldest of the remaining assailants, a man Charlie identifies at Mick, staggers up—Charlie thinks that he looks drunk. He calls An Lu "red" and accuses him of murdering Laura. In response, Harry punches Mick in the jaw and throws him his keys. Mick and his two friends climb into the car and drive away, muttering that the "rats" are destroying the country. Wesley yells "Go home!" after them, and Charlie feels proud—he was wrong to imagine that his father was a coward.

Previously, Charlie has resented his father for behaving passively and quietly in the face of injustices of all kinds, but here, it becomes possible that Wesley's passivity is diplomatic, not symptomatic of his laziness or fear. He's capable of feats of great strength and bravery. For the rest of the novel, Charlie will try to measure up to his father's bravery—he has an excellent role model.

After the men drive away, Wesley tells An Lu, "I'm **sorry**." Harry greets Jeffrey and compliments him on his cricket match the previous day. Jeffrey nods in thanks, but says nothing. Jeffrey and Mrs. Lu help An into his house.

It's important that Harry compliments Jeffrey's athleticism. Perhaps Harry senses that the vandalism directed at the Lus was a reaction to Jeffrey's success.

Wesley and Ruth walk Charlie back to their house, and Wesley says he's **sorry** Charlie had to see An being attacked. He pulls out a pack of cards and three glasses of port. Together, he, Ruth, and Charlie stay up, drinking and playing canasta. Ruth is a superb canasta player, and she enjoys talking trash with her husband and son. Wesley and Charlie play along, smiling.

This is a rare moment of humor and bonding between all three members of the Bucktin family. Perhaps it's symbolic that even here, in this scene of happiness and contentment, all three Bucktins are keeping "secrets" from one another. Silvey suggests that everyone has secrets, and at all times.

After playing cards for an hour, Wesley, Charlie, and Ruth get up to go to bed. Wesley asks Charlie if he's all right—Charlie says that he is, even though he's greatly disturbed by what he's seen. He can't understand how his parents can forget what happened so easily. He thinks about Eliza, crying over her sister's disappearance, and wishes he'd shown more bravery and kindness in comforting her—much as Wesley has shown great bravery and compassion in defending An tonight.

In this scene, it's clear that Wesley provides a role model for Charlie to aspire to. Charlie wants to be brave and dependable, and this requires that he take action. Throughout the first half of the book, Charlie has struggled to translate his thoughts into deeds (much like Hamlet). Now that he has a clear example of how to do so, he will be more successful when dealing with Jasper and Eliza.

Charlie thinks angrily about how Jeffrey was on top of the world all day, and now has to deal with the misery of the attack on his father. He contemplates Jasper, wrongfully bullied and beaten for Laura's disappearance, and realizes that Eliza will hate Charlie if she ever learns that he knew about Laura. It's only a matter of time, he concludes, before he faces the consequences of his actions and his lies.

At the end of the chapter, Silvey suggests that there are always consequences to keeping secrets. The assumption here is that truth will eventually "win out," even if it causes harm and destruction in the process. Silvey will honor—but also subtly revise —this assumption before the novel is over.

CHAPTER 7

It is New Year's Eve morning, and Charlie is spending time with Jeffrey, who has become fascinated with Bruce Lee. Jeffrey wants to learn the infamous "one-inch punch." They talk about karate and play cricket on the Lus' front lawn, which, Charlie notes, is nothing but a bug-free piece of soil now. Friends and neighbors have given An new flowers and seeds to replant his garden. Charlie admits that this is a nice gesture, but he's skeptical that the neighbors would have done anything had An Lu's garden not been destroyed—when Sue Findlay scalded Mrs. Lu, for example, no one did anything about it.

Coming on the heels of the confrontation between the racists and his father, Jeffrey talks cheerily about Bruce Lee. In the past, we've noticed that Jeffrey seemed to use humor to hide his sadness and fear, and this seems to be another example of this defense mechanism. Charlie's skepticism is both cynical and insightful, and he concludes that there is a limit to people's ability to be truly magnanimous. Even when an act seems generous, there may be some residually selfish motive.

Lately, Charlie has found it difficult to eat anything—he's been too obsessed with Eliza Wishart. He also feels anxiety in his stomach because he hasn't heard from Jasper in more than a week. It's possible that the police have arrested him again.

In the past, Charlie paired Eliza and Laura together, and so he didn't want to look at Eliza for fear of triggering the sight of Laura's body. Now, Charlie continues to think of his adventure with Jasper as connected to his love for Eliza, but he seems more content with the "crossover."

Charlie and Jeffrey trade insults—Jeffrey teases Charlie about kissing Eliza, and Charlie says that Jeffrey is "a volcanic eruption of stupidity." They mention the upcoming fireworks display at Miners' Hall, and Jeffrey hints that Eliza might be there. As they laugh and joke, Charlie wonders if he'll able to leave Jeffrey behind when he leaves Corrigan one day. In a way, saying goodbye to Jeffrey will be harder than saying goodbye to his own family. Jeffrey has always made Charlie feel relaxed and confident in himself.

Here, Silvey shows that Charlie's plan to leave Corrigan after resolving the mystery of Laura's death was much more than a childish impulse. Even now, when he's calmed down, Charlie plans to leave the town. This isn't a cold, unfeeling gesture—on the contrary, it confirms that Charlie is a good friend and a loving son. His decision to leave stems from his disgust with the culture of Corrigan and his ambitions to write.

Charlie thinks that it's been difficult not telling Jeffrey about Laura. He wonders if Laura's dead body will rise to the surface of the lake soon, and if he and Jasper will be arrested for hiding her there. He's reluctant to go to the fireworks display that night for fear of running into Eliza—he'll be too tempted to break his promise to Jasper and tell her about Laura. Charlie thinks about leaving town with Jasper, avoiding any responsibility for Laura's disappearance. He could go to a new school, or travel with Jasper, as if they were characters from *On the Road*. Charlie fantasizes about exploring Australia with Jasper and writing letters to Eliza—and one day, he'll be a great author in New York. When that happens, he'll reunite with Eliza and tell her about Laura.

Charlie seems perfectly conscious that the secrets he's been keeping about Laura and Jasper will inevitably "out" themselves. He's struggled to refrain from telling his father, Jeffrey, and Eliza about Laura's body so far, and seems to accept that even if he continues to persevere in this, some other unexpected event will bring the information to the public eye. Charlie continues to escape his guilt and anxiety with fantasies of success and literary fame. His fantasies don't so much avoid the "Laura problem" as they solve it, and Charlie dreams about explaining himself to Eliza.

In the evening of New Year's Eve, Wesley knocks on Charlie's door and asks him if he's going to go see the fireworks. Charlie says that he's not sure, and that he might see Jeffrey instead. Then, Wesley tells Charlie the truth: he *has* been working on a novel in his study, and he's finally finished it. Wesley wants Charlie to be the first person to read it. In his study, Wesley shows Charlie the manuscript, titled *Patterson's Curse*. In spite of himself, Charlie feels jealous of his father. Without knowing it at the time, he'd always imagined himself showing his own manuscript to Wesley one day.

In the previous section, Charlie feared that a sudden, unexpected event would bring information about Laura to light. Here, he experiences a different kind of unexpected event—his father's novel being finished. Charlie's jealousy and resentment in this moment is a little surprising, since he wants to connect with Wesley through literature, and clearly has great respect for him. At the same time, we've seen Charlie resent Wesley for keeping secrets from him. Perhaps the news of Wesley's novel hits Charlie the wrong way because it's unexpected—in other words, because Wesley has kept his book a secret for so long.

Charlie takes Wesley's manuscript and goes to read it in his room. Just as he's beginning, he hears a knock at the window—Jasper is there. Jasper explains that tonight, he and Charlie need to confront Mad Jack—sneak onto his property and tell him that they know he wrote "**Sorry**." Charlie says that confrontations like this only work in movies, and there's no way Mad Jack will own up to his crime right away. Jasper insists that they visit him. He says that they'll pretend they saw him kill Laura and scratch the word onto the tree. Tonight is the perfect time for the confrontation, he says, since everyone else will be at the fireworks display. When Charlie starts to explain, once again, that Jasper's plan will never work, Jasper interrupts him, saying that Charlie can either help him by pretending he saw Mad Jack kill Laura, or not. He suggests that Charlie is only reluctant to go to Mad Jack's because he's afraid, and reminds him that he promised to help Jasper. With this, Jasper walks away from Charlie's window.

In this important exchange between Jasper and Charlie, we see both characters in their strengths and limitations. Charlie is rational, calm, and sensible, and so he recognizes that there's little to no way Jack will just confess to killing Laura if two children confront him. At the same time, Charlie is also weak, indecisive, and prone to romanticizing others, especially Jasper. Jasper, for his part, is charismatic, authoritative, and strong-willed. He's also unrealistic and prone to fantasies of escape and confrontation that could never occur in the real world. Ultimately, Jasper wins out over Charlie. This suggests that Charlie is far from maturation—he's still a child, going along with whatever the stronger person orders, or in this case persuades, him to do.

Remembering his loyalty to Jasper, Charlie decides to follow him to Mad Jack's house. He tells Wesley he's going to see the fireworks with Jeffrey. Wesley is clearly disappointed that Charlie isn't reading his novel right away, and a small part of Charlie is pleased with this.

Another reason that Charlie agrees to follow Jasper is that it upsets Wesley. This is a more spiteful and petty action than we'd expect from Charlie, and it sounds like the kind of thing Ruth would do. At the same time, it's rooted in a sense of literary ambition that we've already seen throughout in the novel, so his spite doesn't seen like a total non sequitur.

Charlie leaves his house and walks through the center of town to Mad Jack's house, noticing the children laughing and playing. He hears his name and turns to see Eliza, looking beautiful. She tells Charlie she's glad he came to see the fireworks, and that she's been meaning to tell him something important. Charlie reluctantly tells Eliza that he needs to go, but he squeezes her shoulder and promises that he's coming back soon. He thinks that he'd give anything to be able to spend the evening with Eliza instead of having to spend the evening at Mad Jack's.

We can tell that Eliza is going to tell Charlie something about the mystery of Laura's death, but Charlie clearly doesn't realize this. His loyalty to Jasper trumps everything else, including his love for his father and for Eliza. This isn't to say that Charlie doesn't care about Eliza—on the contrary, he's come to care more for her than for Jasper. Yet Charlie is a man of his word (or boy of his word), and he made a promise to help Jasper.

Charlie walks the rest of the way to Mad Jack's house, where Jasper is waiting for him. He smiles and tells Charlie he knew Charlie would come. Charlie doesn't reply. Jasper twice asks Charlie if he has a light for his cigarette, and it occurs to Charlie that Jasper is as nervous about trespassing onto Mad Jack's property as Charlie is. Jasper insists that he and Charlie must enter through the front of Mad Jack's house, not the back—they need to project confidence. Charlie sees how false Jasper's confidence is—it's as superficial as **Batman**'s cape. Nevertheless, he follows Jasper to the front of the building.

On this visit to Mad Jack's house, Charlie realizes a great deal about bravery and appearances. Bravery, he sees, is often a kind of illusion, based on superficial markers like drinking, smoking, and bold talk. The broader point, one that Charlie doesn't seem to understand as of now, is that acting *brave makes a person* become *brave. It's the old principle of "fake it 'til you make it," or, in more academic terms, "masculinity as performance."*

Jasper bangs on the front door of Mad Jack's house and calls for Mad Jack. After a few moments, Mad Jack appears at the door. He smiles, much to Charlie's surprise, greets Jasper by name, and invites him into the house, putting his hand on Jasper's shoulder, though Jasper brushes it off at once. Charlie notes that Mad Jack is shorter and less imposing than he'd imagined, with yellow teeth and white hair. As he ushers Charlie and Jasper into his home, he walks with a pronounced limp. Charlie notices old photographs and dead butterflies pinned to the walls.

Our first impressions of Mad Jack both confirm and deny what we've heard about him so far. He's clearly a dirty-looking old man who lives by himself, and there are plenty of strange and disturbing objects in his house. Nevertheless, Jack doesn't "yell" at Jasper, as Jasper had previously described him doing. We can feel that we're about to learn the truth about Jack—a truth that has little to do with the rumors about the man.

Mad Jack invites Jasper and Charlie to sit down, but Jasper insists that they won't sit. Jack, unfazed, asks for Charlie's name. Jasper tersely tells Jack Charlie's name, but adds that he doesn't need to know anything else about Charlie. Jasper gets to the point: he tells Jack that he and Charlie know "what he's done." To Charlie's surprise, Jack sighs and sits down, looking tired and sad. Jasper asks him to admit that he killed "her." Jack quietly tells Jasper that he's wanted to speak with him about the matter for a long time. When Jasper adds that he and Charlie saw Jack kill "her" three weeks ago, Jack is confused—he claims that he "did it" when Jasper was only two years old. Instead of being confused, Jasper insists that Jack is a liar, and urges him to confess what he's done. Charlie notes that Jack looks saddened, but not the least bit intimidated.

This scene is quick, confusing, and intentionally obscure. Jack and Jasper are talking past one another—Jasper thinks Jack is talking about Laura, but Jack is clearly talking about someone else. One wonders why Jasper doesn't try to clarify the pronoun "her" a little earlier. It's almost as if Silvey is intentionally drawing out the suspense for as long as possible. There is some poignancy in that fact that Charlie realizes Jack is innocent long before Jasper does. Jasper takes on the attributes of a petulant child by accusing Jack angrily and groundlessly. Thus, the scene works as a metaphor for Charlie's growth, as he outstrips Jasper in one way.

Jasper presses on, trying to get Jack to confess to killing Laura. He tells Jack that he and Charlie know he killed Laura Wishart, beating and hanging her less than a month ago. Jack is horrified with this information, and barely seems to know that a girl named Laura Wishart has been missing. Jasper tells Jack that he found Laura's body—confronted with this information, Jack asks Jasper how Jasper knows that Laura is dead. Charlie senses that the balance of power is changing: Jack is becoming more confident, and Jasper is beginning to sound like a scared, desperate child. Charlie realizes that Jack had nothing to do with Laura's death, and that he isn't "mad" at all—he's just a sad, lonely man.

It's interesting that Charlie thinks of Jasper as a small child in this scene. Previously, he'd thought of jasper as more mature than he—essentially an adult, capable of taking care of himself. The fact that Charlie is changing his mind about Jasper signals that Charlie himself is maturing. Once again, we see Charlie's great capacity for sympathy for people unlike himself. This sympathy was already apparent in his friendship with Jeffrey and his research into Eric Edgar Cooke, but here, Charlie proves that he's capable of changing his mind about people—abandoning his prejudices and fears—after talking to them for only a few minutes.

Jack asks Jasper why he's being accused of murder, and as he asks the question, he begins to cry. He asks Jasper if it's because of Jasper's mother. Jasper doesn't understand what Jack means, and when Jack realizes this, he weeps and shakes his head. Jack asks Jasper if he's ever wondered why Jack calls Jasper's name every time Jasper walks by. Jasper doesn't know what to say. Jack tells Jasper to turn around—behind him, there are three photographs, which Jack identifies at Jasper's mother, his father, and Jasper himself. Jack tells Jasper that he is Jasper's father's father—Jasper's grandfather. Jack reveals that it was he who drove the car when Jasper's mother died in a car crash.

There is a cliché in the Southern gothic genre that the reclusive, mysterious character (Boo Radley, for instance, in To Kill A Mockingbird*), turns out to be related to one of the main characters in the novel.* Jasper Jones *is no exception, as Jack turns out to be the grandfather of Jasper, the title character. It's in this moment that we realize that Jack's reputation for "murder" is unfounded. He accidentally killed a woman, rather than murdering her in cold blood.*

The narrative jumps forward: Charlie is back in his room, shaken by his confrontation with Jack. On his walk back from Jack's house, he didn't run into Eliza. Instead, he walked silently with Jasper. Once they'd reached Charlie's room, Jasper told him that he planned to talk to his father as soon as possible. Alone, Charlie thinks that his town is a dark, ugly place. Perhaps this is the reason everyone seems eager to cover up ugliness with politeness and smoothness. At the moment, Charlie doesn't blame them for doing so.

This is a sudden, jarring "cut" in the story, and it corresponds exactly to the jarring information that Charlie learns from Jack. Charlie's world has changed—he no longer looks up to Jasper as a symbol of maturity and adulthood. He begins to grow conscious for the first time of the extent to which his town relies upon appearances to hide its true secrets and evils. Though Charlie had glimpsed this phenomenon before, only now does he realize how pervasive it is.

Charlie reveals everything Jack told Jasper. Jack was the father of Jasper's father, whose name is David—he showed Jasper David's old room, which was full of football trophies. Years ago, David met Rosie, his future wife, at a dance outside of town. Rosie was from the neighboring shire (or county), and because she was Aboriginal, David avoided spending time with her in the presence of the people of Corrigan. Shortly after meeting David, Rosie became pregnant, and David told Jack about her. Jack insisted that Rosie get an abortion, and told David that he was ruining the family name. David refused, and married Rosie shortly thereafter. Jack, furious, disowned David. In response, Davis changed his last name to Jones.

There will be a lot of information in this chapter, and much of it is surprising or shocking information. Here, Charlie relates the surprising truth about Jasper to the reader in a relatively calm, organized way. This will contrast markedly with the information he'll learn from Eliza later on. We learn that Jack was guilty of the same racism and prejudice that the other people of Corrigan harbor too.

After Rosie's child—Jasper—was born, Rosie tried to befriend Jack. After a year of attempts, Rosie finally succeeded. When Jack met Rosie, he changed his mind about her. She was beautiful, and a great cook, and he came to enjoy spending time with her—indeed, she became something of a replacement for Jack's own wife. Jack dressed nicely whenever he visited her, and Rosie would always make special food for the occasion. David was never present for these visits—he never forgave his father.

Unlike the other townspeople of Corrigan, Jack overcame his racism through understanding, love, and personal empathy. We've seen characters (like Wesley and Charlie) who aren't racist at all, and we've seen characters who clearly are (Warwick Trent, Sue), but it's only now that Silvey portrays someone undergoing such a significant change of character.

One day in April, when Jack was visiting Rosie, Rosie clutched her side in pain and begged Jack to drive her to the hospital. Jack obliged, but drove over a deep pothole immediately after pulling his car out. As a result, the car skidded into a wall of trees. Jack emerged from the car, covered in glass and blood, only to see Rosie's body lying in front of the car, dead. During the autopsy, it was found that Rosie had had appendicitis. Jack never forgave himself for driving the car that killed Rosie. He often wished that he had died instead of Rosie.

It's difficult to blame Jack for killing Rosie, both because he was doing the right thing by driving her to the hospital, and because he clearly hates himself for his part in her death. Punishing him any further seems downright cruel. We've seen other characters in the novel struggle with guilt, but here Silvey shows the extent to which guilt can ruin a life. Charlie has been dealing with guilt for a few weeks, while Jack has been struggling with it for decades.

In the weeks after Rosie's death, rumors spread throughout Corrigan. Some said that Jack had been in love with Rosie, and was trying to kidnap her, or that the two of them were having an affair and wanted to leave Corrigan together. No one ever mentioned the fact that Jack was trying to save Rosie from appendicitis. In response to the rumors, Jack became a simple, lonely man, never interacting with the townspeople, apart from the children who stole **peaches** from his property. He would always call to Jasper when Jasper walked by, and assumed that Jasper was ignoring him because he hated him. In reality, Jasper ignored Jack's calls because his father never told him that Jack was his grandfather.

It's here that we see for the first time the extent to which the townspeople can ruin other people's lives simply through the power of gossip. We already knew that the townspeople were capable of violence (their attack on An Lu, for example), and we certainly know that they gossip. Yet here, gossip itself becomes an act of violence. Simply by spreading lies, the people of Corrigan sentence Jack to a lifetime of self-hatred and loneliness.

Charlie wonders how Jasper never learned about his father. Even if David never told Jasper, it seems likely that Jasper would have heard something from the other townspeople, who gossiped about how Jack killed Rosie. Perhaps, Charlie thinks, the town became afraid of Mad Jack, and the stories of his insanity quickly obscured any information about his relationship with Rosie. Charlie also feels amazed that he used to be afraid of Jack—it's obvious to him now that Jack is a decent, sad old man.

Part of what's terrifying about this section is that the townspeople seem to act so as to inflict the greatest possible amount of suffering on Jack, whether they know what they're doing or not. In other words, they gossip just enough to shun Jack from public life, but not enough that Jasper would ever know the truth. In contrast to this, Charlie shows immediate sympathy for Jack after hearing his story.

After Jack explained his relationship to Jasper, he told Charlie and Jasper what he'd seen the night Laura died. He'd watched Laura walking alone, seemingly angry. Jack assumed that Jasper and Laura had had a fight, and Jasper would eventually follow her. Instead, Jack saw "someone" else follow Laura.

Silvey reminds us that the mystery is still far from being solved. Even if Jack wrote "sorry" on the car, it remains to be seen who wrote the same word on the tree. The "someone" who followed Laura must be identified.

A few hours after meeting Jack, Charlie is sitting in his room. He hears a tapping at the window—it's Eliza. When Charlie opens the window, Eliza demands to know why Charlie didn't meet up with her at the fireworks show, as he'd promised. She explains that she had to tell Charlie something: she knows where Laura is.

Charlie already sensed that Eliza knew something about Laura, but it wasn't clear that she knew, or thought she knew, the full truth about what happened to her sister.

Charlie sneaks out of his window, his mind full of possibilities: he has no idea how much Eliza knows. It's possible, he thinks, that it was Eliza who Jack saw following Laura. Eliza leads Charlie through town, past families celebrating the new year, and couples kissing. Eliza and Charlie say nothing, but Charlie notices that Eliza is very upset.

At the beginning of the novel Charlie snuck out of the house with Jasper. Now, he sneaks out with Eliza. This may symbolize his growth and development. At first he was a child, idolizing the older, more athletic boy, while now he's matured a little, and walks with Eliza as her boyfriend and equal.

Eliza leads Charlie to the river, on the same path that Charlie takes with Jasper. By the river, Charlie notices an unexpected sight: his family's car. He tells Eliza what he sees, and Eliza is surprised. Slowly, he approaches the car, with a terrible feeling that he already knows what's inside. He peers inside the car, and sees his mother "grappling and gripping" a man he doesn't know, with her dress half off. When Ruth sees Charlie, she pulls her clothes on and yells at him hysterically for being out after dark.

The revelations in this chapter will not end. Even when he's on his way to solve one mystery, Charlie discovers the solution to a different mystery he didn't even know existed. In retrospect, it was pretty obvious that Ruth was committing adultery—she disliked Wesley, left the house for long hours, and, previously, Wesley had told her that he knew about the "things" she did.

As Ruth yells at Charlie, he senses that he doesn't have to listen to her anymore. Ruth grabs his hand and orders him to get in the car so she can drive him home, but he pulls away with ease. Firmly, he tells Ruth that he'll never do what she says again. He adds that Ruth "dug this hole," and now she'll have to "fill it in." As he says this, Charlie feels hatred for his mother, but also sympathy—she looks weak and childish. He tells her, "go home," and as he says the words, he feels as authoritative as Jasper. With this, he turns, takes Eliza's hand, and walks away. Ruth calls after him, but he doesn't listen.

Charlie seems to come of age in this moment. Instead of being afraid of his mother and obeying her every command, he realizes that he doesn't have to obey her anymore, because she doesn't have any moral authority over him. Yet if this is a moment of coming of age, it's a rather depressing one, determined by random chance, not the laws of nature. It's notable that even in the depths of his anger, Charlie also feels sorry for Ruth.

As Eliza and Charlie walk away from the river, Eliza tells Charlie that she's **sorry**, and these simple words soothe Charlie. They walk past Jack's house, and Charlie feels another wave of sympathy for the man, who's now forced to lived alone. Eliza leads Charlie to the glade where Jasper previously took him, and Charlie notices that she doesn't hesitate at all.

The word "sorry" comes up again and again in the novel, sometimes sincerely, sometimes insincerely. Here Eliza is saying the word in an honest attempt to make Charlie feel better. Charlie is sensitive enough to accept Eliza's word. He's also sensitive enough to remember Jack's fate even while thinking about Ruth and Eliza.

Eliza and Charlie arrive at the glade. Eliza looks at Charlie and says that he's been there before—it's not an accusation, just a statement. She tells Charlie that they need to "tell each other things." Charlie asks Eliza to go first, and she agrees. She takes out a letter, and explains that Laura wrote it for Jasper. Charlie asks Eliza how she found the letter, but she only shrugs. Eliza tells Charlie that she's had the "Mean Reds" for the last few weeks. The Mean Reds are a feeling of anger, confusion, and paranoia—Charlie nods and says that he's been feeling exactly this way. As Charlie nods, Eliza begins to shake, and tells him that she killed Laura—it's her fault.

Everything Eliza says to Charlie leading up to her confession is a kind of test—a test of whether or not Charlie will understand what she's been going through. It's because Charlie passes this test—because he, too, has been coping with guilt and anxiety because of his role in Laura's disappearance—that Eliza reveals that she is personally responsible (or considers herself so) for Laura's death.

Charlie explains what Eliza told him about Laura's death. He notes that he needs to "get it out" quickly, because it's too difficult to hold inside himself.

The next sections are written in a rushed, almost panicked style. This reflects the horror and enormity of the information Charlie has learned. It also confirms that he turns to writing as a kind of medicine, a way of reshaping his trauma into art.

Eliza knew that Laura and Jasper were in a relationship, Charlie explains. Their relationship charmed Eliza—it was like a modern Romeo and Juliet—but it also filled her with envy. In November, Jasper stopped seeing Laura, and Laura fell into a depression. Laura stopped talking to Eliza, and stopped eating or talking to anyone else either. Later, when Eliza found Laura's letter to Jasper, Eliza discovered something: Laura and Eliza's father, the shire president, would drunkenly abuse Laura, and had done so since Laura was a child. Eliza never knew Laura received this treatment.

Much like Charlie, Eliza idolizes other people by comparing them to her favorite books. Charlie is constantly comparing people to characters from Kerouac and Lee, while Eliza compares Laura and Jasper to Romeo and Juliet. What follows is the darkest secret we've encountered in the novel so far—Pete Wishart is an incestuous rapist. It's terrifying that someone so respected and powerful in the community could be so evil.

On the night that Jasper took Charlie to the glade for the first time, Eliza tells Charlie, there had been an argument in Eliza's house. Eliza's father was drunkenly yelling at Laura. Eliza's mother was calm and oblivious, as usual, and Eliza was sitting in her room, reading and listening to music, trying to pretend that she couldn't hear the yelling. Suddenly, Eliza heard screaming and pounding from Laura's room, immediately next to hers. There was a loud sound like a gunshot, and then footsteps. Eliza looked out of her window and saw her father driving the car out of the garage.

Eliza takes refuge in her books and entertainment. Instead of facing her problems, and the problems in her own house, she escapes into fantasy and dreams about New York, much as Charlie does. This helps to explain why Eliza blames herself for Laura's death—instead of helping Laura (for example, going into her room and investigating the source of the sound), Eliza chooses to continue reading.

After Eliza saw her father driving away, she heard her sister crying and walking out of the house. Eliza didn't try to comfort Laura because she was afraid and unsure of what to do. After Laura had been gone for a few minutes, Eliza realized that Laura was probably going to meet Jasper. Quickly, she ran out of her house and followed Laura. Eliza was afraid and confused—she had no idea why her father had been shouting at Laura. Nevertheless, she followed Laura to Jasper's glade, wanting to turn back the entire time. In the glade, Eliza hid behind a tree and watched as Laura sat and cried. Eliza wanted to reveal herself, but she insists that she didn't because she didn't want to "disappoint" Laura, who was clearly waiting for someone else.

Eliza's decisions in this section have caused her tremendous guilt and will continue to haunt her. Just as Charlie needs to ease his pain by writing down the information we're reading, Eliza needs to ease her own feelings of guilt by confessing to someone else—Charlie. It might be objected that Eliza's reasons for leaving Laura alone don't exactly make sense, but this is precisely the point. There's a limit to how fully we can understand other people's actions. Sometimes, people do things that make no sense whatsoever. This is why guilt is so harmful—there's no easy way to rationalize Eliza's behavior.

In the glade, Eliza watched Laura as she bent over her lap, seemingly writing a letter. Then, Laura climbed the eucalyptus tree, skillfully navigating from branch to branch. Eliza watched as Laura, now at the highest branch, slipped a rope around her neck, rocked back, and fell from the tree, hanging herself. Instead of screaming or running, Eliza could only stare at her sister's dead body in shock. Eventually, she found the energy to walk forward, where she found a letter on the ground.

Previously, Jasper had claimed that Laura couldn't have climbed the tree by herself, and this claim was a vital part of Jasper's search for a killer, since he had effectively ruled out suicide. Now, it becomes clear that Jasper was wrong about Laura, and also that he didn't know as much about her as he'd thought.

As Eliza stood in the glade, hypnotized by the sight of her dead sister, she heard a voice, and quickly hid again. Jasper Jones arrived in the clearing. Eliza watched as he wailed and moaned, embracing Laura and trying in vain to support her body so that she could breathe again. Then, Jasper ran away from the glade. Eliza tried to follow him, but he was too fast—as a result, she spent hours struggling to find her way out of the bushes. When she emerged, she ran to the river and vomited. Then, she staggered home, arriving shortly before the dawn.

Charlie has always thought of Jasper as a skillful, observant navigator, capable of hiding from anyone. Here, it becomes clear that Jasper isn't as sharp as he'd seemed, as Eliza saw him with Laura, and Jasper had no idea that he was being watched. Eliza's vomiting parallels Jasper's and Charlie's in the earlier chapters of the novel—a sudden, physical rejection of the horror she's just seen.

The day after Laura's death, Eliza read the letter Laura had left, even though it was addressed to Jasper. Eliza learned that Laura and Jasper were planning to leave Corrigan forever. In her letter, Laura told Jasper that she was afraid Jasper had left her behind and didn't love her anymore. She'd gone to the glade in the hopes that Jasper would be there to take care of her.

Jasper is more responsible for Laura's death than we'd thought. While he certainly didn't kill her, his negligence partially inspired her to hang herself. This piece of information will be important in the final chapter of the novel, but for the time being it's almost ignored as Eliza proceeds with her frantic confession.

By reading Laura's letter, Eliza learned why she'd been arguing with her father the night she killed herself. Pete Wishart had raped Laura many times—now, she was in "trouble." Laura wrote that she was "full of milky poison." At dinner, in the presence of her mother and father, she had accused her father of raping her and impregnating her. Amazingly, Laura's mother refused to believe her. Later in the evening, while Eliza was still reading in her room, Laura's father came into Laura's room and warned her never to tell anyone about his abusive behavior again. Laura refused, and tried to hit her father—she even threw a glass paperweight at him. In response, her father beat her mercilessly, and then left her alone to weep. With these words, Charlie writes, "it's out."

Pete Wishart not only abused his daughter, but also raped and impregnated her. Laura was "in trouble" in the sense that she was carrying a child—her own sister as well as her daughter. Perhaps even more shocking than this fact is the knowledge that Laura's mother listened to Laura tell the truth about Pete, and then ignored the information altogether. Previously, we've seen the townspeople ignore unpleasant facts in order to preserve their worldview (for example, refusing to see that a Vietnamese boy is good at sports), but the intimacy of Laura's confrontation with her mother makes her mother's rejection especially horrifying.

As Eliza reads Charlie her sister's letter, her voice is sad yet unflinching. Charlie realizes that Eliza has been going through a pain far worse than his own: she blames herself for Laura's death. At the same time, Charlie is deeply angry with Eliza—if she hadn't taken Laura's letter, Jasper would have found it, and neither he nor Charlie would have had to go through the hardships of the last month. Still, Charlie realizes, if Eliza had left the letter, Charlie would never have become close friends with Jasper. Charlie wonders how Jasper will take the news contained in Laura's letter. In all probability, Charlie thinks, he will blame himself for Laura's death even more than he already does.

Charlie's greatest act of empathy in this scene is to realize that as great as his own pain has been, Eliza's is much greater. It is Charlie, too, who first thinks about how Jasper will take the news of Laura's suicide. He's thinking about other people, even when he's at his most anxious. Eliza's calmness, which has previously been charming and alluring to Charlie, is now a little disturbing. Beneath the calmness, there is a great deal of anger, guilt, and anxiety.

Eliza then reveals the final piece of the mystery to Charlie: it was she who carved "**Sorry**" on the tree in the glade. Then she asks Charlie to tell her what he knows. Reluctantly, he explains that Jasper showed him Laura's body—the most horrible sight, he tells Eliza, that he'd ever seen. Afterwards, he and Jasper cut Laura down, weighed her body with stones, and threw her in the river. Charlie can barely look at Eliza, and he begs her not to hate him for what he did. Eliza tells Charlie that it hurts her that he didn't tell her what he knew. Charlie nods, but explains that he had to keep his promise to Jasper. Eliza doesn't reply.

Eliza doesn't explicitly forgive Charlie, but she doesn't yell at him, either. Thus, it's unclear exactly how Eliza feels about Charlie's deception. Certainly, this isn't the confrontation scene Charlie had imagined between the two of them—he had pictured Eliza screaming at him for moving Laura's corpse. In a way, it's worse that Eliza remains silent after Charlie explains what he did. Instead of moving past her anger and sadness, Eliza contains it, potentially allowing it to grow even worse.

Eliza mutters that it's her fault Laura died: if she'd spoken to Laura while she was in the clearing, Laura wouldn't have hanged herself. Charlie insists that this isn't the truth—it is her father who is responsible. He **apologizes** to Eliza for moving Laura's body. Eliza says that she forgives Charlie, though she wishes he'd told her. In a way, though, she is glad Charlie saw Laura's body, because it means that he knows what she's going through.

Even if she can't express her emotions, Eliza can use words to explain them. Charlie, who had previously failed to assure Eliza that she wasn't a bad person, is now quick to tell Eliza not to blame herself. This shows that he's grown more sensitive to other people's needs and feelings, even in the last few weeks.

Charlie asks Eliza why she didn't come forward with Laura's letter, and if she was afraid of her father. Eliza says nothing, which Charlie takes as proof that she was. Charlie starts to ask Eliza if her father ever raped her, but Eliza shakes her head no before he can finish the question. Suddenly, she asks Charlie to dance with her, and Charlie obliges. He closes his eyes and imagines living with Eliza in Manhattan. Eliza tells him that she plans on leaving Corrigan, and asks him to promise to come with her when she leaves. Charlie promises, and kisses Eliza on the head. Eliza begins to cry. Charlie holds Eliza and thinks that perhaps, for once, he's doing the right thing—sometimes a quiet embrace is better than a witty poem.

The sudden transition from the discussion of rape to the act of dancing is jarring, but this is the point—Eliza wants to forget everything she's just told Charlie, just as Charlie wants to forget about Laura's corpse. The young people in the novel—Charlie, Eliza, Jasper, Jeffrey—are all alike insofar as they use entertainment and humor to escape their problems and emotions. The best example of using art in this way is the book Jasper Jones *itself, which Charlie "writes" to overcome his own conflicted emotions about the events he's witnessed in Corrigan.*

Still alone in Jasper's glade, Eliza leads Charlie toward the hollow under a tree. In the hollow, there are tins of food, plates, tobacco, and cards. Charlie realizes that this is where Jasper sleeps at night. Eliza wants to sleep in the hollow with Charlie. Charlie crouches down next to her, but thinks that sleeping in the hollow isn't right, since it means taking Jasper Jones's space. As he lies down next to Eliza, he wonders what he and Eliza will do with their information about Laura. They could keep silent, thereby saving Eliza from her father's anger. But even if they say nothing, Charlie thinks, it's possible that the information will get out anyway.

There's something deeply symbolic about the fact that Charlie is now sleeping in Jasper's home. It's as if Jasper has ceased to be a convincing role model for him, so Charlie has "replaced him" by becoming more mature, sensitive, and capable himself—taking on the qualities Charlie once associated with Jasper. Now that all the information about Laura is known to Charlie, he faces a completely new challenge—what to do with it? Charlie had imagined that he would be able to tell the public about Laura's killer, but now he sees that this is more difficult than he'd envisioned.

As Charlie lies in the hollow with Eliza, he hears a noise, and looks up: Jasper is in the glade. Jasper demands that Charlie explain why Eliza is there. In response, Eliza throws him Laura's letter. Jasper says that he won't be able to read it, since it's too dark. Instead, Eliza explains everything she's told Charlie. Charlie notices that she's bitter and angry as she explains—she clearly blames Jasper's absence for Laura's depression. As Eliza tells Jasper about the sight of Laura hanging herself, he groans and jumps into the nearby waterhole.

We see the conflict between Eliza and Jasper, one which will have enormous consequences in the final chapter. Eliza blames Jasper for Laura's death, or at least she wants him to suffer for Laura's death, just as she has suffered. Clearly Jasper is *suffering, though—his act of throwing himself in the waterhole could be another act of suicide, just like Laura's hanging.*

When Jasper jumps into the waterhole, Eliza and Charlie are shocked. Instead of standing still, however, Charlie removes his shirt and jumps into the water after Jasper, wondering if Jasper might be trying to drown himself. In the water, Charlie finds Jasper's body—he's holding himself beneath the surface. Charlie is forced to push to the surface when he runs out of air. As he rises, he's surprised to feel Jasper's body rising with him. At the surface of the water, Jasper grips Charlie's body violently, and for a moment Charlie thinks Jasper is trying to drown him. Then, Jasper embraces Charlie. Charlie realizes what has been the truth all along: Jasper is a frightened, lonely boy. He asked Charlie to help him with Laura because he was too frightened to go by himself. If even Jasper Jones feels fear, Charlie thinks, then everyone does. People shouldn't aim to rid themselves of all fear—they have to learn how to "carry fear" and live with fear. Charlie remembers talking about **Batman** with Jeffrey—much like Bruce Wayne, people have to learn to achieve things while also struggling with their emotions.

Charlie proves how much he's grown lately. In the past, Charlie would often "freeze up" in moments of crisis. After seeing how quickly his father runs to save An Lu, however, Charlie learns how to take action without hesitation. It's also an important reversal from the first chapter: initially, Jasper was the one "leading" Charlie, but now, it's Charlie who must "lead" Jasper out of the waterhole. It's not clear if Jasper was actually planning to kill himself, but it seems likely that Charlie's presence is enough to convince Jasper to come to the surface. Guilt, Silvey suggests, is a state of loneliness, and sometimes it's satisfying simply to know that other people sympathize with one's guilt. Charlie also remembers his conversation about Batman—one must accept fear and then *move past it, rather than simply denying that it exists.*

Charlie and Jasper swim to the side of the waterhole and climb out. In silence, Charlie, Eliza, and Jasper look at the water, which leads directly to the river. Eliza says, "She's down there forever."

Eliza's words can be taken literally or metaphorically. Metaphorically, Laura will be "down there" in the depths of the three teenagers' minds for the rest of their lives.

Eliza, Jasper, and Charlie lie in the glade and look up at the stars. Suddenly, Charlie turns and tells Jasper that he and Eliza are thinking of leaving Corrigan too. Jasper immediately rejects this idea—if Charlie and Eliza leave, the police will resume their investigation, track down the two of them, and possibly implicate them in Laura's death. Eliza nods and tells Charlie that Jasper is right. She says that she's going to tell "everyone" about what her father did to Laura, and how Laura died. Charlie tells Eliza that this is impossible: if Eliza explains that Jasper was connected to Laura, the police will arrest him. Eliza indignantly says that she has to tell the truth, and that she'll leave out the parts about Jasper. Charlie objects that this wouldn't be the truth at all. He tells Eliza that she blames Jasper for Laura's death, and that she's trying to punish him in the same way she's been punishing herself. Eliza doesn't speak, but Charlie senses that she knows he's right. Jasper only shrugs and tells Eliza that she should do what she thinks is right.

In this lengthy section, Charlie, Jasper, and Eliza have a long-overdue discussion. They've been trying to solve the mystery of Laura's disappearance, but now they must solve the mystery of how to announce the news to the town of Corrigan. Although it would be easy to tell the town that Pete Wishart is a rapist and an evil man, Charlie is too loyal to his friend Jasper to allow this to happen. Any hint of a connection between Jasper and Laura would be disastrous, since it would allow the police to arrest and interrogate Jasper once again, perhaps even killing him. Agonizingly, the best course of action for Jasper's sake is to remain silent about Laura's suicide.

Jasper, Eliza, and Charlie fall asleep in the glade. The next morning, they walk back to Corrigan, slowly and silently. When they pass Jack's house, Jasper stops and says that he needs to talk to Jack once more. He tells Charlie that his father has left town—-Jasper has no idea why. He puts his hand on Charlie's shoulder and thanks him, and then turns to Eliza and mutters an **apology** to her. Although his voice is quiet, Charlie can tell that the apology means a great deal to him. Charlie and Eliza watch Jasper walk toward Jack's house. They see that Jack is sitting on his porch. Charlie senses that he'll never see Jasper again.

Here we get another kind of "sorry." Even if the apology is muttered, it's entirely sincere. Jasper regrets his role in Laura's suicide as much as he regrets anything he's ever done. Yet it's not clear what the impact of these apologies will ultimately be. It's not clear, in other words, if Eliza's anger with Jasper changes at all because of his apology. At the same time, Charlie continues to love and respect Jasper, and feel an almost preternatural connection with him.

Charlie and Eliza make their way toward Corrigan. Along the way, a car pulls up by them, and a man asks Eliza if she's Pete Wishart's daughter. Eliza shakes her head, and the man drives on. Only a few minutes later, another car stops them, and the Sarge steps out and orders them to get in. Reluctantly, Charlie and Eliza get in the car, and the Sarge drives them to the police station, muttering that he's gone to a huge amount of trouble to find Eliza. At the station, the Sarge sends Eliza inside and tells Charlie to go home, warning him never to cause him trouble again. Charlie walks away, thinking that he knows firsthand what the Sarge is capable of. Instead of going home, he waits a few blocks from the station, worrying that the Sarge will hurt Eliza. A few hours later, Eliza emerges from the building, apparently unharmed, accompanied by her parents. As they drive away, Charlie tries to catch Eliza's eye from her car. He thinks that Eliza sees him and smiles, but he can't be sure.

This section describes the first "test" of the secret that Jasper, Eliza, and Charlie must now keep. Eliza is given the opportunity to confess what she knows to the police, and she does nothing. Clearly, she respects the agreement she's come to with Charlie and Jasper, that they must keep quiet about what they know in order to protect Jasper from the police. Yet there's no honor or glory in protecting this secret, at least not for Eliza. She wishes she could bring her father to justice, and perhaps for this reason, she doesn't make eye contact with Charlie—she's alienated from him by her desire for revenge and her continuing sense of complicity in Laura's death.

CHAPTER 8

In the end, Charlie explains, he doesn't leave Corrigan. However, his mother leaves the night after Charlie discovered her infidelity. Ruth yells at Wesley, rips his manuscript to pieces, and hits him. In response, Wesley does nothing. Ruth storms into Charlie's room, finds Charlie's suitcase, and fills it with her clothes and jewelry. Before she leaves, she tells Wesley "what she'd been meaning to say." Charlie notes that Wesley is unsurprised by the things Ruth tells him. He already knew about her secrets, though Charlie isn't sure how long he knew. It's possible, Charlie thinks, that Wesley was trying to protect Charlie from the pain of learning that Ruth was unfaithful. In any event, Ruth has destroyed her own reputation in Corrigan—only a few hours after she leaves, the neighbors have already begun to gossip, inventing stories about her.

Coming after the events of the previous chapter, it's not a surprise that Charlie decides to stay behind in Corrigan. Indeed, the entire principle of "leaving" is shown to be a little childish and escapist. Charlie's mother, for example, leaves her home in Corrigan instead of dealing with her problems and responsibilities head-on. For many pages now, Silvey has shown that Charlie is far more mature than his mother. The scene in which Ruth leaves, yelling like a little girl, is the culmination of this point, and another example of how "the truth wins out." Ruth's attempts to seem "normal" have fallen into shambles in only a few minutes.

It has been two weeks since Ruth left, Charlie reports. She has gone to live with her family, who provide her with a luxurious house. She calls Wesley only once, to tell him that she isn't returning. Wesley doesn't protest, but tells her to talk to Charlie to set things right. Ruth refuses to do so.

Ruth refuses to honor her duties as a mother. In a sense, she is Charlie's opposite, as Charlie is a child who wants to be a man as soon as possible, while Ruth is a woman who wishes she could be a child again, without any responsibilities or duties.

Wesley takes care of Charlie without Ruth's help. In Ruth's absence, he's grown out his beard, and Charlie notes that he looks quite "stately." He had kept another copy of his manuscript in his desk, so Ruth didn't destroy his novel at all. He has sent the novel to various publishers, though he hasn't heard back yet. In the meantime, however, Charlie has read the book. He finds it so beautiful and brilliant that he isn't jealous at all.

Wesley's beard might symbolize his own growing maturity in Ruth's absence, for he now has to take on new duties because Ruth refuses to perform them. It's no coincidence that this "maturation" coincides with the completion of his novel. Writing is itself a way of growing up—as we saw in the last chapter, it's a way of making sense of the horrible or nonsensical, and reaching an inner state of peace.

Charlie reports that Eliza did not say anything to the police when they brought her into the station—she just sat in silence for hours until they let her go. A few weeks later, when her father is out of the house for work, she gives her mother Laura's letter and tells her that Laura's "trouble" was real. Instead of telling her mother where Laura died, she told her that she blamed her for Laura's death—if her mother had believed Laura's story, Laura wouldn't have killed herself. If Eliza's mother goes to the police with what she knows, Eliza explains, Eliza will take her mother to the place where Laura died. So far, however, there has been no word in public of Pete Wishart's abusiveness. Charlie asks Eliza if she wants her father to be punished. In response she simply says that he'll "get his."

It's both impressive and cowardly that Eliza puts the responsibility for revealing the truth in another person's hands, even if that person is her own mother. On one hand, Eliza is brave—and morally correct—to tell her mother about Laura. At the same time, Eliza passes off responsibility to someone else because she's not strong enough to deal with it on her own. Of course, Eliza is still basically a child, and should never have been shouldered with such a horrific burden in the first place. Charlie has already hinted that there are major consequences for concealing the truth, and here Eliza echoes his thoughts, suggesting that Pete will pay, whether legally or not.

Lately, Charlie has spent much time with Eliza. Often, they go to the glade together, and Eliza brings her sister small gifts, which she places in the hollow where Jasper sleeps. Sometimes, they sleep in the hollow themselves and kiss. Charlie isn't nervous or awkward about kissing anymore—on the contrary, he enjoys the secret he shares with Eliza. One day, he thinks, he will tell Eliza exactly how he feels about her, and perhaps she'll say the same words back to him.

Charlie has grown considerably in the course of the novel. One might be tempted to conclude that he has fully become an adult, but Silvey refutes this here. Charlie is still not fully formed—he lacks the ability and insight to express his thoughts and feelings to other people, and he still isn't entirely sure what to make of Eliza herself. In the final chapter of the novel, Silvey will show the consequences of Charlie's uncertainty.

CHAPTER 9

It is the first day of school in Corrigan, and all the children talk about the events of the summer, especially Laura's disappearance. There are also two other children, the Beaumonts, who live in a neighboring town and have been kidnapped. Jasper hasn't shown up for school, or even checked his name for the football team. Jeffrey has become a popular student due to his cricketing, and is now a regular member of the cricket team. Warwick Trent has returned to school, having been held back another year.

Silvey begins this chapter on a strangely depressing note—Laura's disappearance, amazingly, is only one of many summer crimes involving young children. Wesley was right, clearly, when he said the world was changing. Nevertheless, some of the changes are positive—Jeffrey, at least, is more popular than he was before, suggesting that Australia might be becoming more tolerant to minorities.

At the moment, Charlie is walking to Jack Lionel's property, surrounded by a group of schoolboys. Charlie has made a bet with Warwick—if he can sneak onto Jack's property and steal more than four **peaches**, he'll be granted "immunity" from Warwick's bullying and beatings for an entire year. If he fails, Warwick will tie him to Miners' Hall overnight and throw eggs at him.

This test of Charlie's bravery requires no bravery whatsoever, of course. He knows Jack Lionel well, and can freely walk onto his property without harm. This seems like a convenient symbol that Charlie has matured and learned to conquer his fears—but perhaps it's a little too *convenient.*

Jeffrey, Eliza, and Charlie walk close together, followed by schoolboys. Charlie longs to kiss Eliza, but he knows that he can't in public. As Eliza turns to walk back to her house, Charlie asks if he'll see Eliza tonight, and Eliza replies that she might see him earlier—she has a surprise for him. After Eliza walks away, Jeffrey asks Charlie how he plans to steal fruit from Mad Jack. He offers to accompany Charlie, but Charlie insists that this isn't necessary. He promises Jeffrey the **peach** pits he's going to collect.

Charlie's feelings for Eliza continue to remain largely secret, known only to Jeffrey and a few others. Eliza's parting words are a little sinister, but they barely register as we prepare for the humor and satisfaction of Charlie's "daring" journey to steal peaches from Jack Lionel's tree.

At Mad Jack's house, Warwick orders Charlie to claim his **peaches**. Charlie climbs over Mad Jack's fence easily, and walks forward, knowing that Warwick never expected him to make it this far.

In one sense, climbing the fence around Jack's house is the most frightening part of the challenge for the average child—once you're in, the rest is easier.

Charlie approaches Jack's house and goes around the back, where Jack is sitting on his back porch. Jack greets Charlie warmly, and Charlie returns the greeting. Charlie asks if Jack has any **peaches**, and Jack replies that all his peaches have been stolen or pecked apart by birds. Careful to keep Jack on the back porch where the students can't see him, Charlie asks Jack if he can take some of these ruined peaches—Jack cheerily obliges, saying that Charlie is free to take any of the dirty peaches lying on the ground. Charlie looks down and sees old peaches covered in insects. He's afraid to touch them because of his dislike of insects, but Jack insists that he has nothing to be afraid of—the bees have consumed so many of the peaches that they're "lickered up" and harmless. Charlie is about to pick up the peaches when he realizes that his return won't be as heroic as he'd hoped—Warwick will ask him why he took so long, and why he's found only dirty peaches. Charlie asks Jack for a favor—in return, he'll come by to cook Jack dinner on Sunday.

Throughout the novel Charlie has learned to enjoy deception and creative lies. Here, he seems to be having a great time, carefully orchestrating Jack's movements so as to preserve the illusion that he's a hero. It's ironic that Charlie does *face one test of bravery, despite his illusions: he has to face his fear of insects. Once again, Charlie learns that he has nothing to fear from the bees, as knowledge and education teach him to overcome his anxiety. It's touching that Charlie offers to see Jack again in the near future. This suggests that Charlie will give Jack some much-needed friendship ad company, even if Jasper is unlikely to see Jack again. (It's worth noting that this corresponds to the ending of To Kill a Mockingbird, in which Scout befriends Boo Radley, the reclusive man who had previously terrified her.)*

A moment later, the schoolboys see Charlie emerge from behind Mad Jack's house, holding five **peaches**. Charlie notes with amusement that it still took courage for him to grab the peaches, since it meant touching insects. As Charlie returns from the back of the house, Mad Jack bursts out of the front of his house, carrying a shotgun and yelling. Charlie turns, snatches the shotgun out of Jack's hands, throws it on the ground, and pushes Jack to the ground. Jack gives a theatrical wink as he keels over, and Charlie whispers that he'll see Jack on Sunday. With this, Charlie walks away from the house in triumph.

This is a comic highpoint of the novel—Charlie brilliant orchestrates a scuffle, rigging the scene so that he "defeats" Jack. This is also Jack Lionel's last scene. In a sense, Jack's story is the happiest in the entire novel. Once a lonely old man, Jack can now look forward to friendship and companionship from Charlie, and recognition, at the very least, from his grandson Jasper.

Charlie returns to the crowd of students, and they immediately begin asking him questions about Mad Jack. Charlie notices with satisfaction that Warwick Trent is hanging back—clearly, Charlie has beaten him. Charlie plans to give Jeffrey three **peach** pits, Eliza one, and then keep one for himself. As the students slap Charlie on the back in congratulations, someone points to the town—there is a plume of smoke coming from the city center, meaning that a house is probably on fire. Immediately, the students run toward the fire. Charlie drops his peaches and runs, too.

Charlie's triumph seems complete, as he has won respect from the same people who once tormented and bullied him, even Warwick Trent. Indeed, it would be possible for the novel to end in this section—on a note of optimism. Yet Silvey doesn't end things here, and doesn't give Charlie the chance to savor his victory. It's still worth keeping in mind that Charlie doesn't hesitate to run toward the danger, showing that he's genuinely braver than he was only a month ago.

Charlie runs toward the source of the fire. He realizes that the fire is coming from Eliza's house. Neighbors and firefighters run around the house, yelling and screaming. With enormous relief, Charlie sees Eliza sitting outside the house, completely unharmed. Charlie also sees Eliza's mother, also unharmed, and her father, in an oxygen mask and bandages, but still alive.

It's not entirely clear what to make of the scene right away, and in this sense, it brings the entire novel full-circle. Silvey began with a sudden, mysterious, and horrifying crime, and here he ends his novel with a similar tableau. This effectively gives Charlie a test—how will he handle this new crime without Jasper's help?

Charlie realizes that Eliza is looking at her house with completely calmness. He thinks about the murderer he's read about, who said, "I just wanted to hurt someone." He thinks about Jenny Likens, who had the chance to save her sister but failed, and then must have spent the rest of her life struggling with her guilt.

It now becomes clear that Eliza is responsible for the act of arson. Frustrated that she couldn't bring her father to justice for abusing and raping her sister, Eliza burned down the house with Pete in it. Charlie recognizes that Eliza is reacting to a deep sense of guilt, the same sense of guilt that Jenny Likens showed. This brings the novel back to the same questions Charlie had previously raised: when are criminals guilty for their actions, and when should they be forgiven? To what extent is revenge an act of evil?

Charlie hears neighbors talking about how the fire might have started—it could have been a cigarette or the stove. After only a few moments, Charlie hears Jasper Jones's name. Charlie then reveals that he's known that Jasper Jones is gone from Corrigan. He realizes this a few weeks ago, when he was playing cricket with Jeffrey. At that moment, Charlie stared up at the sky and felt, as if by ESP, that Jasper was leaving. Charlie thinks that the police will be looking for Jasper soon enough, but they won't find him—he is too clever.

This section is simultaneously the darkest and the most inspiring part of the book. It's dark because it suggests that Eliza burned down her house to drive Jasper Jones out of town for good, knowing full well that he would be blamed. Eliza has previously shown a desire to punish Jasper for his role in Laura's death, and here she takes an opportunity to punish both Jasper and both of her parents. It's interesting that the "level" of punishment each of these three people endures seems to correspond exactly to their guilt in Laura's death. Pete is the most badly hurt, since he is the most directly responsible for Laura's depression and suicide. Eliza's mother is the next most punished, since she's losing her house—if she had listened to Laura, Laura would still be alive. Finally, Jasper is the least punished—he was thinking of leaving Corrigan anyway, and, as Charlie recognizes, the authorities will never arrest him.

Charlie walks up to Eliza, who continues to look calmly at the flames. Thinking that he finally has "the right words," he bends to her and whispers them in her ear.

Silvey ends on a note of ambiguity. We don't know if we should praise Eliza for her revenge, or view her as a criminal. We also don't know if we can hold Eliza personally accountable for her actions, or if we should blame her behavior on the greater evils committed by her mother and father. If nothing else, we can conclude that the truth does "win out" in the end, but not in the neat, just ways Jasper and Charlie had predicted. By keeping the secret of Laura's death "bottled up," Eliza felt compelled to take matters into her own hands. Ultimately, it's unclear how we're meant to feel about Eliza and Charlie. For this reason, Silvey doesn't tell us what Charlie whispers to Eliza. We must decide for ourselves how to judge Eliza's actions.

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