

Playing Beatie Bow



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RUTH PARK

Ruth Park was born in New Zealand, and lived a transient, working-class life for many years as a result of her father's work as a manual laborer on road and bridge projects in northern New Zealand. Ruth doggedly pursued a serious education in spite of her family's frequent moves, and after studying at St. Benedict's college and Auckland University, she went on to become a contributor and editor to the children's pages of several major New Zealand newspapers. In 1942, she moved to Australia and married another writer, D'Arcy Niland, and began publishing novels in the late 1940s—beginning with her groundbreaking debut, *The Harp in the South*, which unflinchingly exposed the gritty reality of life in Sydney's poorest quarters. Park wrote several novels for adults, a series of memoirs, and an enormous number of radio plays, but at a certain point in her career began writing almost exclusively for children. Her books for young adults explore themes of longing, the difficulties of fitting in, and the journey of discovering one's place in the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Abigail Kirk is flung backwards in time to the Sydney of 1873—a time when Australia was not a unified country but rather a series of colonies between whom tensions and rivalries over trade and cultural differences were high. The Rocks district—in Abigail's 1980 Sydney—was rapidly being gentrified, redeveloped, and transformed into a commercial area, aimed at drawing tourists and shoppers, and so Abigail's shock at discovering her neighborhood as a rough, dangerous area rife with unspeakable poverty, crime, and disease is palpable. It is not just the physical changes to her hometown, though, that Abigail must contend with when she is thrown into the past—the cultural differences also overwhelm her. As she is forced to wear stiff woolen clothes, use chamber pots and forgo daily baths, Abigail longs for her comfortable, modern life, and as she witnesses the horrible ways women are treated through her encounters with Beatie, Dovey, and the prostitutes in the "Suez Canal," an exceptionally dangerous enclave of the Rocks, Abigail recognizes how privileged and easy her "real" life is, and longs for the world which once bored and even repulsed her.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Books for young adults that feature a split in time are common—they provide a way for children who might be spoiled, stuck-up, unhappy, or somewhat at sea to reach back

through time and contextualize their own difficulties in the larger scheme of human history. In *Playing Beatie Bow*, Abigail Kirk, devastated by her parents' separation and having grown more than a touch nasty and impetuous as a result, is sent back to the 1800s where she is forced to live a life much harder than her own relatively cushy one in the early 1980s. Similarly, *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen tells the story of Hannah Stern, a young Jewish girl in contemporary New York who, after balking at the boring tradition of her family's yearly Passover seder, is sent back in time to 1942 Poland and forced to live through the Holocaust. The sobering events of the past allow Hannah to see her family—their history, their traditions, and the gravity of the suffering that has led to their present-day happiness and liberation—in a new light. Other novels for young people that wrestle with the tensions between vastly different time periods—and the ways in which time travel allows young teens to appreciate their "boring" or unsatisfactory present moment—include *Both Sides of Time* by Caroline B. Cooney and *The Girl With the Red Balloon* by Katherine Locke.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Playing Beatie Bow*
- **When Written:** Late 1970s
- **Where Written:** Sydney, Australia
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction; historical fiction; coming-of-age tale
- **Setting:** The Rocks District, Sydney, Australia
- **Climax:** Abigail Kirk finally understands that the reason for her journey to the past has been to help ensure that the psychic "Gift" is passed on.
- **Antagonist:** Beatie Bow
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bow on the Big Screen. In 1986, *Playing Beatie Bow* had become so popular as a defining Australian novel that it was adapted as a film. Despite the filmmakers' ambitious investments in recreating Sydney's Rocks district as a fully-fleshed set constructed on an abandoned industrial site, it performed rather poorly at the box office—even so, both the novel and the film remain seminal Australian works.



PLOT SUMMARY

Abigail Kirk is born Lynette Kirk, a name her mother Katherine regrets and her father Weyland loves. When Abigail's father leaves Abigail and Kathy for a younger woman, Abigail renounces the name Lynette, and chooses for herself "Abigail" because it sounds like a witch's name.

Four years after his departure, Abigail and her mother still live in a modern, high-rise apartment building designed by Weyland. Abigail is fourteen years old, a thin plain girl who is clever but reserved, and very much a loner. She feels there is an "empty place" inside of her, but doesn't know what created it or could possibly fill it. She frequently babysits for her next-door neighbor Justine Crown's children, Vincent and Natalie.

Down at the playground, Abigail has started to see children playing an athletic but slightly disturbing call-and-response game called Beatie Bow, in which a child in a sheet chases other children round the yard until the next Beatie Bow is tagged. The game thrills and excites Vincent but frightens Natalie badly. Natalie insists that even the children who play the game are frightened of it, and that the only one unperturbed by the bizarre ritual is a "little furry girl" who Natalie often sees watching from a corner of the playground. One evening, Abigail, sewing with Natalie, takes a bit of crochet from the Crown family's rag bag and decides it would make a great collar for a **green dress** she's working on.

Kathy tells Abigail that she has secretly been seeing Weyland—Weyland wants the three of them to live as a family once again, and has offered to move Kathy and Abigail to Norway to live with him while he undertakes an architectural course. Abigail is incensed, unable to believe that her mother would let Weyland back into their lives; Abigail's mother assures her, though, that love is a powerful force, and that Abigail will not be able to understand it until she experiences it for herself. One evening, after an argument with her mother, Abigail stops at the playground—darkness is falling, the air is cold, and the little furry girl is again in the corner of the playground. Abigail approaches the little girl, who becomes frightened and runs away. Abigail pursues the little girl down the winding neighborhood streets as the clock in the town square chimes six. After emerging from an alleyway, Abigail finds herself surrounded by horse-drawn carriages, candle-lit lamps, and strangely-dressed people: she has traveled back in time.

Abigail is taken in by the little furry girl, who is the titular Beatie Bow of the children's game, and the rest of her family—the kindly Granny, who believes that Abigail is the mysterious "Stranger" who will save the Bow family's "Gift," the lame, sweet girl Dovey, the strapping young seaman Judah, the sickly child Gibbie, and lastly Samuel Bow, the children's father, who suffers visions of his traumatic time fighting in the Crimean

War and lashes out violently. The year is 1873. Abigail is afraid that she'll never find her way back to her own time, but soon realizes that though she has traveled far in time, she has not gone far in space—she is practically in her own backyard.

After an attempt to escape fails miserably, Abigail realizes that the Bow family is obsessed with preserving the "Gift" of second sight that runs through their family's blood, and will not let her go until she fulfills her mysterious duty to save the four Bow children, though what shape her heroism will take is unable to be foretold. The link between the past and the present is revealed to be the bit of crochet on Abigail's dress—Granny and Dovey have crafted a pattern for such a project, but have not made it yet, and know that it is how she found her way back in time. Abigail is reluctant to accept her role at first, but eventually realizes how kind, generous, and special the Bows are—she even falls in love with Judah, but is devastated when she realizes he has been betrothed to Dovey since childhood.

One evening, after a trip to the beach with Beatie and Judah, Abigail returns to the Bow home to find that Uncle Samuel, in one of his fits, has set it ablaze. She saves the family from the fire, and in the aftermath of the blaze, Granny at last allows Abigail to return home.

Back in her own time, Abigail finds herself missing the Bows. She goes to the public library to read more about what happened to them, and finds that Judah perished in 1874 on a seafaring journey—Abigail attempts to use the magical bit of crochet to return back to the Victorian era and warn the Bows, but she is unable to.

The narrative jumps ahead four years into the future. Abigail is nearly eighteen years old, and has been living abroad with her parents. The Kirks have decided to return to Sydney and live in their old apartment. Abigail's bitter longing for Judah and all the Bows has subsided somewhat, but she still carries memories of them with her. Abigail decides to check in on her next-door neighbors, the Crowns; they still live in their apartment, and all of them are delighted to see her. Natalie has just been out shopping for her eighth birthday, and excitedly introduces Abigail to her uncle Robert Bow—Justine's brother. Abigail is shocked to find that Robert is the spitting image of Judah. As she wonders how this could be, she realizes that Justine must have been a descendant of the Bows all along, and that Natalie must be the most recent recipient of the Gift, as she was able to see Beatie on the playground all those years ago.

Robert greets Abigail familiarly, as if they've known each other for many years, and is taken aback by his own reaction to her, as surprised by it as she is. Robert asks if he can call upon Abigail, and she says that she can—the two plan to go through Robert and Justine's family Bible that weekend, as Abigail teases Robert with the fact that she once knew "some Bows."

That Saturday, Robert and Abigail sit down with the Bible and

examine the tree. Abigail realizes that it was not Judah or even Dovey who passed on the family line, and thus the Gift, but sickly Gibbie. Beatie became the headmistress of a great school in Sydney. Abigail, overwhelmed, begins sobbing with grief, and Robert kisses away her tears. She tells him the entire story of her time with the Bows, and he believes her. Abigail realizes that time is not a black hole—it is a river, always changing, but pushing the same waters from source to sea. Katherine comes into the kitchen and asks Abigail and Robert what they're doing—Abigail coyly responds that the two are playing Beatie Bow.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Abigail Kirk – The protagonist of the novel, fourteen-year-old Abigail Kirk is a quiet and reserved girl who does not believe in love, and who shares little of herself with the world around her, always keeping herself guarded even with those she cares about. Abigail lives a relatively normal teenage existence—her parents are separated, as her father Weyland left Abigail and her mother Kathy for a younger woman some years ago, but before he left he installed Abigail and Kathy in a fine apartment in a high-rise tower. Abigail frequently babysits for her next-door neighbors, Vincent and Natalie Crown, and it is on a visit to the playground with the two of them that she first encounters a mysterious little girl with “furry” hair. Abigail, an accomplished seamstress, sews herself a **green dress** with a crochet yoke taken from a scrap bag at the Crowns', and one afternoon—wearing her new dress out—decides to follow the mysterious furry girl through the streets of Sydney. Abigail does not realize that she is following the girl through time, though, and a disoriented Abigail finds herself lost in 1873, in the grimy, working-class Rocks district. As Abigail adjusts to her strange new circumstances, she is taken in by the Bow-Tallisker family, who believe Abigail when she cagily tells them that she is an amnesiac who cannot remember where she comes from. Adjusting to life in the 1800s is hard enough, but Abigail's particular journey is complicated even further when she realizes that the Bows see her as the mysterious Stranger—an individual who, according to a prophecy seen by the foresighted Granny, who has the Gift of clairvoyance, will save the families and help ensure the Gift is carried on to the next generation. Abigail struggles against her seemingly cosmic duty, wanting only to return to her own time—but the longer she spends with the Bows and the Talliskers, the more they start to feel like family, and the deeper her feelings of love, respect, gratitude, and duty towards them grow. By the end of her journey, Abigail has done quite a lot of growing up—she has learned about the transformative power of love, the importance of familial duty, and the fickle but profound nature of time, history, and legacy.

Beatie Bow / “The little furry girl” – The fierce, fiery, headstrong foil of the book, Beatie Bow is a young girl who finds herself able to move through time—though she does not know that that is what is happening to her. She follows the cries of children shouting her name through a well between worlds, which allows her to see the playground game named after her, Beatie Bow, in full swing in the Mitchell courtyard. Beatie then unwittingly lures Abigail Kirk on a chase through the city streets, culminating in both girls' return to the past—to 1873, to be precise. Beatie's family takes Abigail in, and as Abigail grows to know the Bows, she continues to see Beatie as her way back to the future. Beatie insists time and time again that she does not know how she even got to Abigail's time in the first place, though she is dreadfully afraid that she has the Gift—the ability to see into the future. Beatie knows that the Gift is the family legacy, and will be passed down to one of the Bow children, but she does not want to be the recipient—instead, she wants to be a learned woman and a scholar. Beatie is loud and obnoxious, often contrary, aggressive, and explosive. Her desire to carve her own path and receive an education makes her an outlier in her own time, as well as wise and determined beyond her years even by the standards of Abigail's time. Beatie can also be read as the antagonist of the book, as she seems to stand in the way not only of Abigail's return to her own world, but also in the way of Abigail's love of Judah and of Abigail's acceptance into the Bow family.

Samuel Bow – Granny Tallisker's son-in-law and the father of Judah, Gibbie, and Beatie, Samuel Bow is an ex-soldier who still bears the physical and psychological scars of his time in the Crimean War. A timid, melancholy man until he begins drinking, Samuel, after just a sip of alcohol, flies into terrible rages—“spells” that cause him to believe he is back in the war, fighting against the Russians. Samuel causes great havoc during these spells, much to his own personal embarrassment.

Judah Bow – Son of Samuel and brother to Gibbie and Beatie, Judah is a sunny, strapping young man of eighteen who works as a seaman, and is frequently off on maritime voyages. When Judah is around, the Bow-Tallisker home is full of laughter and song—Judah is the peacemaker of the family, and, as Samuel is so often impaired, its guiding light. Abigail realizes that she has feelings for Judah, and though she tries to keep them to herself, Beatie eventually finds them out. Beatie angrily reveals to Abigail that Judah is betrothed to Dovey, as penance for having injured her and rendered her lame in a cart accident when they were young. Abigail hopes that Judah will choose her over Dovey, but even after the two share a kiss and Abigail confesses her feelings, it is clear that it is Dovey whom Judah truly loves. Abigail mourns Judah's loss twice—once, when she realizes he does not love her, and another time, when, after her return to the present, she looks up the Bows in old newspapers and realizes that Judah perished at sea just months after

Abigail left the Bows and returned to her own time.

Gibbie Bow – The sickly youngest child of the Bow family, Gibbie is bedridden and ailing from numerous unnamed diseases. As Abigail gets to know him better, she realizes that Gibbie is not actually ill—he is merely pretending, hoping to absorb from the rest of the family the affection and love that he feels he lost when his mother died. Gibbie is petulant, whiny, and needy, and he irks Abigail to no end, but once she realizes the motivations behind Gibbie’s annoying actions she feels a kind of sympathy for him. It is revealed, eventually, that Gibbie—sickly as he was, or pretended to be—was the unlikely member of the Bow family who carried on the family line, carrying through his lineage the precious family Gift.

Granny Tallisker – The matriarch of the Tallisker-Bow clan, Granny originally came over from the Orkney isles north of Scotland with her granddaughter Dovey in tow, to live with her own daughter, Amelia, who had married Samuel Bow. By the time Granny arrived, however, her daughter—and most of the other Bows—were sick with smallpox. Amelia and four Bow children perished, leaving only Samuel and his children Judah, Beatie, and the sickly Gibbie behind. Granny has taken up her role as the leader of their joined clans, and despite her age she has a profound, quiet power that comes from her possession of the Gift—a mysterious family trait that has run through the Tallisker clan ever since Granny’s ancestors were supposedly captured by elves seven generations ago. Granny, in her old age, is preoccupied only with preserving the Gift in the face of a terrible prophecy, which foretells the barrenness of one Bow and the death of another. The prophecy also foretells that a Stranger will come to save the day. When Abigail arrives, Granny believes that Abigail is the foretold savior of the Gift, and conspires to keep her in the past despite. Despite her machinations and obsessions, Granny is kind, good, and warm—so much so that Abigail knows instinctively and immediately that Granny will care for her. Granny would do anything for her family, and by proxy, anything for Abigail—though at the back of her mind is always the fact that the Gift must be preserved at any cost.

Dorcas “Dovey” Tallisker – A quiet, sweet, beautiful, and lame young woman who is a cousin of the Bows and the granddaughter of Granny Tallisker. After an accident in her childhood during which she and Judah overturned a cart, shattering Dovey’s leg bone, she has suffered pain and a distinctive limp. Dovey is eventually revealed to be betrothed to Judah—as Abigail has fallen in love with Judah, she is saddened by this news, and surprised by her feelings of jealousy and anger toward the unimpeachably sweet Dovey. Despite the tension between the two women, Dovey is always deeply kind to Abigail, and they otherwise share a pleasant, nurturing friendship.

Katherine “Kathy” Kirk – Abigail’s mother Kathy is a loving but flighty woman who owns a vintage shop called Magpies. After

Abigail and her mother were abandoned by Abigail’s father, Weyland, the two formed a close friendship—a friendship that is threatened when Kathy reveals to Abigail that she has secretly been seeing Weyland again, and wants to accept his offer to move Abigail and Kathy to Norway to be with him and live as a family again. Kathy is distressed when Abigail reacts badly to the news and accuses her mother of being a pushover. She tries to explain to Abigail that love is a powerful force that cannot be understood unless experienced, but her sage advice falls on deaf ears—that is, until Abigail is transported to the past and finds herself swept up in an unlikely love of her own.

Weyland Kirk – Abigail’s father, a handsome half-Norwegian architect who left Abigail and her mother Kathy when he took up with another woman some years ago. Weyland’s absence and betrayal have both weighed heavily on Abigail, and caused her to shut herself off from other people and from the world. He designed the building in which Abigail and Kathy live.

Justine Crown – Abigail and Kathy’s next-door neighbor, Justine is a kind but often harried and distracted woman, mother to both Natalie and Vincent. She is grateful for Abigail’s help in watching the children, and is always kind to her. It is eventually revealed that Justine—whose maiden name is Bow—is a direct descendant of Gibbie Bow, and a carrier, though not in possession of, the Bow family Gift.

Natalie Crown – A sweet but melancholy and easily frightened little girl who lives next door to Abigail, and whom Abigail regularly babysits. It is Natalie who points out the “little furry girl” to Abigail at the playground. Natalie is frightened of the Beatie Bow game, unlike her brother, and prefers to watch the furry girl observe the game. Natalie feels that the little girl is horribly sad. Years after Abigail returns from the past, she visits the Crowns, and it is revealed that Justine—and thus Natalie and Vincent—are descendants of the Bows, and that Natalie is a bearer of the Gift.

Dorothea “Doll” Victoria Brand – A sickly prostitute at the whorehouse, with whom Abigail is locked in the attic for a time. Doll tells Abigail her sad story as she coughs up blood and gets drunk on gin, and Abigail fears that she will wind up like Doll one day. Despite the grotesque sadness of her story, Doll reveals that Hannah—the madam and her own aunt—put her to work rather than letting her starve after the death of her parents, and for that she is grateful.

Robert Bow – Justine Crown’s brother, Robert Bow, is—like his sister—a direct descendant of Gibbie Bow. When Abigail encounters Robert on a visit to the Crowns’, she is shocked to find that he looks exactly like Judah Bow. She believes he must be a direct descendant of her onetime love, and is surprised to find that it was instead Gibbie who carried on the Bow line, and the mysterious Gift. Abigail and Robert have an immediate affinity for one another, and embark on a romantic relationship rather quickly after their first meeting.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Grandmother – Kathy’s mother, with whom Abigail has a contentious relationship.

Vincent Crown – A rather nasty child who lives next door to Abigail, and whom she babysits regularly. Vincent is obsessed with the playground game *Beatie Bow*, which both frightens and excites him. Vincent is Natalie’s brother.

Hannah – The obese and bearded madam of a whorehouse in a dangerous part of the Rocks district.

Barker – A husky-voiced pimp at a whorehouse in the Rocks district.

Maude – A prostitute at Hannah’s whorehouse. The prettiest and healthiest of the bunch, Maude is the “dress-lodger”—the handsomest girl in any given whorehouse, who is sent out in fine garments belonging to the proprietor.

Chow – An Asian man who works in Hannah’s whorehouse.



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.



FAMILY, DUTY, AND CONNECTION

At the heart of Ruth Park’s *Playing Beatie Bow* is the question of what it means to be part of a family—what one owes their family and is owed by them, and what one’s role is in continuing family legacies and traditions, however burdensome they might be. Abigail Kirk, saddened and frustrated by the pain and confusion that has marked her own family in recent years, learns through her journey back in time that though duty to one’s family is not always easy or enjoyable, it is one of the most important things in life. Park suggests that for a family to support one another in a mutual, healthy way, all members must be dedicated to loving, honoring, and helping one another. This is not an easy lesson for Abigail to learn, but by the end of the novel, she too is able to look past the small fissures and fractures in her family and find love, support, and happiness with them.

Park begins the novel by introducing a protagonist whose family seems irreparably fractured. At fourteen years old, Abigail Kirk feels betrayed by her family’s dissolution. Her father Weyland left her and her mother Kathy years ago to live with a younger woman, and just as Abigail has begun to find a way through the pain and feelings of abandonment stemming from this incident—largely by cutting her father out of her life and choosing to feel nothing towards him—Abigail’s mother Kathy announces that Weyland wants for them all to be a

family again, and for Abigail and her mother to move from their home in Australia to Norway. Abigail is irate, and in disbelief when it becomes apparent that her mother, if given the choice, would likely choose to move to Norway with Weyland rather than stay in Australia with Abigail. Abigail does not want to reconcile with her father, and once she realizes that her mother is in her own way betraying Abigail as well, she longs to distance herself from her mother as well, proclaiming in a fit of rage that she would rather stay in boarding school in Australia alone than move to Norway with her family. Abigail feels alone and dejected, and does not seem to feel any sense of duty or connection to her family.

However, Abigail’s world and values are changed by circumstances beyond her control, as she is pulled into the past precisely at the height of her inner turmoil over her familial woes. Abigail is so miserable with her own family and yet still, deep down, longing for a familial connection, that she spends more and more time with the children next door, Vincent and Natalie Crown. Abigail babysits the children a few times a week, taking them to the park and playground and watching as Vincent plays a disturbing game called *Beatie Bow*. Natalie observes a little “furry” girl watching from the sidelines, and tells Abigail that she believes the girl is in great pain. One afternoon, after a huge fight with her mother, Abigail is walking home past the playground when she sees the little girl, and chooses to engage her in conversation. The little girl flees and Abigail follows her, and she is soon pulled through time to 1873, where she realizes that the little girl at the park was *Beatie Bow* herself all along. Alone and disoriented, Abigail is taken in by the Bows and the Talliskers, two branches of a large Scottish family residing in the colony of New South Wales. In attempting to flee, or at least distance herself from one family unit, she has found herself smack in the middle of another.

At first, Abigail is suspicious of the Bows and the Talliskers. She does not trust them, does not want any part in their lives, and is only concerned with getting back to her own time. She is so distressed by her surroundings that she even finds herself longing for her mother. Abigail attempts to run away, but when her escape proves disastrous and lands her captive in a whorehouse, in need of the Bow family’s rescue, she realizes that getting back to her own time will not be as easy as she thought. The Bows rescue her from peril, demonstrating that they feel a duty to Abigail even though she is not technically a blood relation. Abigail then realizes the many sacrifices the Bows and Talliskers have all made on her behalf, and begrudgingly agrees to uphold her own duty to them. The Bows and Talliskers reveal the secret truth of their family to Abigail when she returns from the whorehouse: there is a Gift of second sight that has been passed down through the Tallisker family, and which Granny Tallisker now has a duty to ensure lives on through the Bow children. A prophecy has told Granny that a Stranger will come and help to preserve and strengthen

the gift. Granny tells Abigail that she needs to wait patiently for the moment when she will be called upon to help the Bows, and Abigail—begrudgingly, but dutifully—agrees to stop trying to escape and begins to enmesh herself in the lives of the Bows.

As Abigail shoulders the duty that has been thrust on her by Granny Tallisker, she grows more and more invested in the lives of the Bows and the Talliskers with each passing day. She spars with the feisty Beatie, helps Granny around the house, takes care of the sickly Gibbie, and falls in love with the strapping Judah. As she opens herself up to the beauty—and the duty—of familial love, Abigail comes to understand how she has been shirking her connection to her family back in her own world. Rather than behaving with empathy, forgiveness, and kindness towards her parents, she has judged them, berated them, and shamed them for things she cannot begin to fully understand. Abigail's journey to the past, then, serves to open her eyes to the importance of maintaining family connections.

By the end of the novel, Abigail returns to her own time with a newfound wisdom, and informs her mother that she is okay with moving to Norway. Abigail, Kathy, and Weyland have their first normal, pleasant family dinner in years, and when Weyland attempts to apologize to Abigail and explain himself, she gracefully tells him that she understands everything. Abigail knows that her family deserves her understanding, and she truly does love them and wants to keep them together; just as she learned to shoulder duty with grace and determination in the past, she now does so in the present. Through Abigail's profound change of heart, Park clearly suggests that family connection—through love, duty, and compassion—is the glue that holds generations together, and allows families to flourish, grow, and thrive.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LOVE

At the beginning of *Playing Beatie Bow*, fourteen-year-old Abigail Kirk has spent years mourning the dissolution of her parents' marriage. Abigail's devastation and feelings of abandonment have so deeply permeated her mind and heart that she closes herself off from friendship and love, and actively looks down on her "love-mad" classmates. It is not only romantic love that Abigail rejects, however—through her cynicism regarding paternal and maternal love, she also finds her relationship with her father marred by "an eradicable memory of rejection of love," and pities her mother, who is still in love with her father and who longs to accept his recent proposal to rekindle their marriage. Yet as the novel unfolds and Abigail is flung back in time to 1873, she finds herself, against all odds, caught up in the tides of love—romantic, platonic, filial, sororal—and at last understands what a force of nature love can be. Through Abigail's journey towards accepting the transformative power of love, Park argues that love can change the course of a life—and the course of history

itself.

In the beginning of the novel, Abigail's parents are separated and have been for many years. Abigail nurses a quiet hatred of her father Weyland, who abandoned her and her mother Kathy, and this simmering anger she has harbored for so long has numbed her to the phenomenon of love. Abigail maintains a cool, reserved, and quiet demeanor, never letting anyone see her real feelings or emotions. She describes a longing to share herself with someone, but doesn't even know how to begin; she also describes having an "empty place" inside of her, but similarly does not know where it came from or how to fix it. Abigail is clearly ready for some kind of love—to express it or to receive it—but has so stunted herself that she does not know how. Instead of trying, she continues to hold a holier-than-thou view; she sees herself as older and wiser than the other girls her age who fall in love left and right, and when her mother announces that Abigail's father has asked the both of them to move to Norway, to live as a family once again, Abigail excoriates her mother for allowing herself to be taken advantage of again. Abigail does not believe that love can be a nurturing force—only a silly, superfluous, or even destructive one. Abigail's mother attempts to show Abigail how she is rejecting love because she has not felt it: "Love is a thing you have to experience before you know [...] how powerful it can be," Kathy tells Abigail in the heat of an argument, but her words are no use—Abigail sees love not only as a waste of time, but as an actively hazardous pursuit. By showing Abigail's cynicism and superiority, Park also demonstrates her naivete.

After a fight with her mother, Abigail is whisked away to the past when she follows Beatie Bow home from the playground and through an invisible split in time, and everything about Abigail's world transforms. At first, when she is taken in by the Bows and the Talliskers, Abigail is indignant at her bad luck and reluctant to trust the family that has shown her love by bringing her into their fold. After getting to know the family better, Abigail begins to enjoy their company, but still longs to return to her old life. When an escape attempt goes wrong, and Abigail is captured by the proprietors of a brothel, the Bows—specifically, Granny and Judah—rally to save her, and from that moment on Abigail feels both profoundly indebted to and affectionate towards the people who have taken her in and cared for her all this time.

As Abigail's attitude toward platonic love transforms, and she starts to let other people in little by little, she also finds herself pulled toward feelings of romantic love. After Judah saves Abigail when she is captured and dragged off to the warehouse, Abigail begins to realize that she has feelings for Judah. As she reckons with the fact that she has at last been "pierced" by love, she is amazed to discover that her mother was right all along: she had to experience love before she could understand its true power. As her feelings grow, Abigail finds herself happily daydreaming constantly, but also wishing for

harm or ill fortune to come to those who would threaten her happiness with Judah. When she finds out that Dovey and Judah have been promised to one another since childhood, she harbors bad feelings towards Dovey, and when she learns that the prophecy Granny Tallisker has seen foretells the death of one of the Bow children, she prays it is either Beatie or Gibbie, and not her beloved Judah. Abigail sees how love has the power to transform one's thoughts and feelings, and understands at last the "love-mad" behaviors of those she had once looked down upon.

After saving the Bows and Talliskers from a raging fire at their shop, Abigail realizes that Judah truly loves Dovey and not her when he runs straight to Dovey in the aftermath of the blaze. Her duty to the Bows fulfilled, and her heart effectively broken, Abigail leaves the Bows and the Talliskers behind and returns to the present. As Abigail reenters the world she left behind, she finds herself transformed by all the love she encountered in the past, despite the hardship and heartbreak she also encountered there. Abigail longs not only for Judah, but for all the other Bows as well—she feels the "empty place" inside of her, which had filled for a time, begin to come back, more desolate than ever. She has been transformed emotionally, and allowed herself to become vulnerable to the happiness and sadness that love can bring. Moreover, Abigail's mother Kathy observes a change in her daughter that she cannot quite put her finger on—it is the transformation engendered by Abigail's having surrendered herself to the experience of love.

Through the use of a jump forward in time in the novel's last chapter, Park demonstrates how Abigail has put the lessons she learned in the past in practice. When Abigail and her parents return to their apartment in Sydney after four years abroad, her next-door neighbor Justine Crown teases Abigail about all the love affairs she must have had with beautiful Norwegian men while living away, and Abigail admits to having had several more experiences with love. At the very end of the novel, Abigail is then surprised to meet Justine's brother Robert—he looks exactly like Judah, and through her conversations with him Abigail finds that he is a Bow, descended from Gibbie. Robert and Abigail feel strangely familiar with each other immediately, and have an open, frank, and vulnerable relationship from the very start. It is no doubt the transformative experience of love Abigail encountered in 1873 that has allowed her to flourish into an emotionally vulnerable and outwardly loving young woman four years later.

The story of *Beatie Bow* is one of family, of legacy, and of the steady onward march of time and history—but it is also one of love, and the power it has to transform lives and transfigure the world. Because Abigail was at last able to allow herself to give and receive love freely without the cynicism and guardedness she exhibited in the "real" world, she was able to encounter a new part of herself, and complete her duties not only to the Bows, but to her own family, and also to herself.



TIME AND THE PAST

Abigail's journey through time takes her to 1873 Sydney, where she sees her hometown as it was over a hundred years ago. It is significant that

Abigail Kirk is flung backwards to 1873 specifically, a time during which the colony of New South Wales was in a chaotic infancy. At the start of the novel, Abigail herself is at a crucial beginning-point in her life—she has not yet figured out what she believes, or who she wants to be. At first Abigail sees time as a tormenting force that has trapped her—she does not recognize why the past is relevant, and cannot see how or why the generations of untold history that have led up to 1873 and the generations that will proceed from it involve her. As Abigail gets to know the Bow family and observes their own unique relationships to time and history, however, she discovers a new appreciation for how time works, and how the past is not a stagnant, far-off thing but a living, breathing part of the present.

When the novel begins, Abigail is not particularly interested in the past, history, or how time affects herself or those around her. Yet Abigail's mother Kathy runs a vintage shop, and her father Weyland is an architect—in other words, Abigail's parents' professions are intimately concerned with the past and the future, respectively. Abigail is proud of her parents' successes—she delights in finding vintage goods in her mother's shop and using them to make her own **clothes**, and despite her self-professed hatred of her father, she is privately proud of his accomplishments—but on the whole, Abigail has no particular concern with either history or innovation as concepts. The journey of the novel is partly Abigail's journey toward understanding how the flow of time works, and how the past informs the present. Indeed, by the time Abigail returns from her travels, she is more deeply interested in the neighborhood she lives in, in the ways her actions stand to affect others, in the history of those around her, and in the way time ferries the lessons, traditions, and legacies of the past into the present.

During her stay with the Bows, three major characters speak to the ways most humans conceive of, observe, and interpret time. Granny Tallisker is obsessed with the past and future; her preoccupation with the Gift handed down through seven generations with her family, and ensuring it is preserved at any cost, speaks to a fixation mainly on the weight of the past but also the unknowability and untamable nature of the future. Judah Bow, a seafaring free spirit who has no interest in his past or in the tales of the future Abigail presents him with, has committed radically to living in the present moment, and honoring only the slice of time directly in front of him. In Beatie Bow, Abigail encounters someone whose fears of and need to tame the future have overwhelmed her; Beatie is petrified that she will be the recipient of the fearful Gift of clairvoyance, and yet is also desperate to know how the children in the

playground of the Mitchell building knew her name. Beatie, therefore, is both frightened of the ability to commune with the future, and desperate to know what it holds. As Abigail watches the Bows struggle against their attempts to contain, avoid, or manipulate time, she slowly and subtly learns that time cannot be wrangled or plotted towards or against. Abigail resigns herself to being a pawn of time as she takes up the duty of being the Stranger who will, at some unforeseeable point, rescue the Bow family Gift, and as she slowly learns this lesson in patience and surrenders to time itself, she finds that time passes more quickly and yet holds more within it than she ever dreamed.

When Abigail returns to the present and finds that not even a full minute has passed in the “real world,” she is struck by how much has transpired in between two strokes of the Town Hall clock. Later, overwhelmed by how badly she misses the Bows, and by how sad she is that there seems to be no trace of them in her present life, Abigail considers how time compresses all that transpires within it—love, loss, happiness, and sorrow. Abigail laments how the Bows seem to have been swallowed up by the “black vortex” of the past. However, when Abigail returns to Sydney after years of living abroad and is introduced to Justine Crown’s brother Robert Bow, a direct descendant of Gibbie Bow, Abigail begins to see that time is not like a cruel, ravenous vortex that just swallows people up and loses them to the future, but rather more like a river, whose source and sea are one and the same, and which ferries memories and legacies through the years and generations.

Through Abigail’s journey, Park makes a nuanced and complex point about how the nature of time itself dictates forward motion, but that this constraint does not necessitate losing sight of the past, or disregarding one’s present. By the time she returns to her own world, Abigail has encountered—all within one family—people obsessed with the past, with the present, and with the future. In experiencing time through the Bows, and by observing their mistakes and successes in conceiving of how time and history work, Abigail emerges from her journey more in control of her relationship to time and the past. She recognizes the potent power of history, despite the way any present moment seems to engulf all that came before it, and at last sees that time is all truly connected.



THE WISDOM AND POWER OF CHILDREN

Playing Beatie Bow is populated largely by a cast of children and young adults. From the headstrong but cynical teen protagonist Abigail Kirk (who feels “a hundred years older and wiser” than her classmates even before her education and transformative journey to the past takes place) to her fiery foil Beatie Bow (who may or may not be in possession of a mysterious psychic Gift), Park’s young characters are deeply complicated, perceptive, and often wise

beyond their years, and yet many are held back in ways small and large by the constraints of the moment in which they live. By presenting young characters that complicate restrictive notions of what children can know—and demonstrating the suffocating and prohibitive nature of prejudices against children—Park suggests that the wisdom of children is expansive, subversive, and often uncanny, and should never be underestimated or discounted. Despite their youth and occasional naivete, the children within the pages of *Beatie Bow*—and indeed, Park argues, the children of the world—have the potential to save their families, to turn the tides of history, and to outsmart, outwit, and outmaneuver those who would undervalue them.

Abigail Kirk is presented as an impetuous, rather spoiled, and self-pitying young girl at the start of the novel. Despite her health, her loving mother, her luxe apartment in a high-rise building designed by her architect father, and her relatively stable, trauma-free existence, Abigail is obsessed with all the things in her life that have gone wrong, and blind to the privilege and blessings that have come her way. Abigail is met with a rude awakening when she is flung backwards in time to 1873 and forced to adapt to a new and much more difficult era of history. Abigail is in possession of a very specific wisdom—knowledge of the future—but is, by the same turn, naïve to the ways of the world she has found herself in, and she stumbles and struggles often as she makes her way through it. Thus, Abigail is rendered both powerful and powerless, wise and naïve. Park imbues her novels’ protagonist with a very specific kind of power, but infringes upon her agency by thrusting her into a set of circumstances in which her primary skill—her knowledge of the future—is underestimated and undervalued. Park also doubles down on this theme in the other members of the Bow family, and repeatedly shows how children’s agency and worth is frequently undervalued, just as with Abigail herself.

Beatie Bow is another character whose wisdom and power are constrained and even quashed by the constraints not only of others’ perceptions of her, but by the era in which she lives. When Abigail first encounters Beatie, she has already been hearing the girl’s name for weeks. “Beatie Bow” is the name of a game favored by neighborhood children in Abigail’s present—it is a dark playground game in which a circle of children chant rhymes until someone dressed as the ghost of Beatie Bow is set loose, and whomever that child tags becomes the “new” Beatie. In this way, Beatie seems to hold a sacred wisdom by virtue of her being the star of such a cryptic game, and so in Abigail’s eyes, she holds a kind of power already. Of course, there is also the fact that Beatie is the one who literally pulls Abigail through time—Park presents Beatie right off the bat as a very powerful little girl, indeed. As Abigail spends more time with Beatie, she sees the ways in which Beatie’s wisdom and power are marginalized by the constraints both of her family’s secretive

nature and the prejudiced, sexist world of Victorian-era New South Wales. Beatie has a strong, fiery personality, and often succeeds if not in winning arguments against her siblings and other family members, at least frustrating everyone to the point that they give in to her whims. Beatie is a clever girl, and longs for a real education in languages, numbers, and literature—but education is forbidden to girls of Beatie's time. As wise as Beatie is, she is nonetheless limited by the unfair constraints of her environment, and the ways that others underestimate her abilities and capacity for brilliance. It is eventually revealed that in the future, Beatie becomes a scholar, and a renowned, fearsome headmistress at a very good Sydney school—the neighborhood children know her name more than a hundred years later because of the same virtues that made her powerful as a child: her fierceness, her smarts, and her dogged pursuit of validation in the face of those who would underestimate or discredit her.

Gibbie, the sickly youngest Bow child, is portrayed at first as weak and frail, constantly on the verge of dying from an unnamed disease. As the novel progresses, though, and Abigail is more and more often charged with looking after Gibbie, she sees the truth: he is either a hypochondriac or a phony, a melancholy child in mourning for his deceased mother who has seen, through example, that sickness and death are the surest ways to receive attention and even reverence. Gibbie, then, has a power that contrasts his apparent weakness—he knows how to manipulate those around him to bend to his will, wait on his every need, and heed his every call. Moreover, Gibbie will be revealed to contain a power that no one can yet see, despite the “constraints” of his sickness. The prophecy Granny has seen tells her that one Bow child will be barren, and one will die. Granny—and the rest of the family—assume Gibbie will be the one to die, but at the end of the novel, it is revealed that Gibbie lived a long, healthy life, and succeeded in passing on not just the family name but the family Gift as well. In this way, Gibbie is shown to have been a “powerful” child all along, despite the constraints he created for himself, and the ways his self-defeating behavior caused everyone around him to see him as a weak link, thus greatly underestimating the role he would come to play in the family's legacy.

Children are often powerful and wise in *Playing Beatie Bow*. The world of young adult literature is often meant to bolster young readers' beliefs in themselves and what they can do, and in *Playing Beatie Bow*, Park constructs a narrative in which the young carry the greatest sense of purpose and often save the day. In this way, Park argues against the underestimation of children, and uses her novel to show the subversive and surprising ways in which children are often much wiser or much more powerful than they appear at first glance.



SYMBOLS

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



CLOTHING

Playing Beatie Bow's major symbol is clothing—throughout the novel, clothes symbolize

the differences and similarities between people from vastly divergent worlds. Abigail, who enjoys sewing as a hobby and is quite good at it, in fact launches the entire narrative when she acquires a bit of old crochet from a scrap bag at the home of her next-door neighbor, Justine Crown. Abigail is fascinated with the pattern, which depicts Parnassus grass and bears the mysterious initials A.T., and sews it onto a dress she's been working on as a neckline. While wearing the dress, Abigail runs away from her mother's shop and follows a “little furry girl” she has seen at the playground, only to find herself trapped in another century—with the little furry girl, Beatie Bow herself. In this way, the dress is the literal bridge between two different worlds and symbolizes the permeability of not just the physical, but also the psychological barrier between them—but it is not the only significant and symbolic piece of clothing in the book.

When Abigail arrives in the past, she is injured in one of Samuel Bow's ranting episodes, as she collides with him and falls to the ground, twisting her ankle and hitting her head. The Bows take Abigail in, and as she settles into life with them, she hides from them the fact that she comes from the future, instead claiming to be an amnesiac who has lost her way. The Bows dress her in the clothing of their time—scratchy woolen dresses, heavy undergarments, thick stockings, and uncomfortable shoes—and at first Abigail is despondent to be wearing the uncomfortable, unattractive garb. As time passes, though, and as Abigail learns not just to tolerate but to love the Bows, the clothes become second-nature to her; when she returns to her own time, she is wearing the green dress again, but is still in Dovey's woolen stockings and Granny's leather shoes. She keeps the two pieces as a keepsake, and a way to remember the world she lived in—and the people she loved—for a strange few months in her fourteenth year.

Clothing symbolizes the possibility of bridging gaps not just in history but in relationships. Clothing brings Abigail into the Bows' world—literally and physically—but it also forms a point of connection between her, Dovey, Granny, and Beatie, as the four women share, wash, tend, and mend clothing for themselves and for one another. By the same token, clothing is a bargaining chip—Granny and Dovey confiscate Abigail's green dress upon her arrival and tell her they have burnt it, as it is the way for Abigail to return to her own time. Granny and Dovey know that the crochet yoke is something they have planned to knit but have not yet begun to sew, and also that the initials it

bears—A.T.—are Granny’s own. Granny wants Abigail to stay in the past, as she knows that Abigail is the prophesized Stranger who will be instrumental in helping to preserve the Bow family Gift of second sight. Abigail, when she realizes that the garment has not been burnt but merely hidden, begs to have it back and searches the house high and low for it, but ultimately settles into her role with a stubborn grace after Granny promises that as soon as her duty is fulfilled, she will have the dress back. Clothing is the great equalizer in the world of *Beatie Bow*, and serves to bridge both physical and emotional gaps between many characters as the narrative progresses.

standards—and these will comprise two of her great overarching tasks as the novel unfolds.

☞ [Abigail’s] chief concern was that no one, not even her mother, should know what she was like inside. Because maybe to adults the turmoil of uncertainties, extravagant glooms, and sudden blisses, might present some kind of pattern or map, so that they could say, ‘Ah, so that’s the real Abigail, is it?’ The thought of such trespass made her stomach turn over. So she cultivated an expressionless face, a long piercing glance under her eyelashes that Grandmother called slippery. She carefully laid false trails until she herself sometimes could not find the way into her secret heart. Yet the older she grew the more she longed for someone to laugh at the false trails with, to share the secrets. What secrets? She didn’t yet know what they were herself.

Related Characters: Grandmother, Katherine “Kathy” Kirk, Abigail Kirk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

Abigail doesn’t just want to keep herself separate from her friends—she wants to keep even her own family members in the dark as to what she is truly like deep down inside. Abigail is so afraid that someone will get to know the real her, and will be able to predict her thoughts, actions, or emotions, that she has cultivated a stolid persona and even “laid false trails” to deceive those around her into believing she is something other than what she truly is. Still, Abigail knows that there is a burgeoning desire for connection buried within her—she has been trying to deny it for a long time, but as the action of the novel starts to unfold, she is on the precipice of desire for a change.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Puffin Books edition of *Playing Beatie Bow* published in 1980.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Outside, [Abigail] was composed, independent, not very much liked. The girls at school said she was a weirdie, and there was no doubt she was an outsider. She looked like a stick in jeans and a tank top; so she would not wear them. If everyone else was wearing her hair over her face, Abigail scraped hers back. She didn’t have a boy friend, and when asked why she either looked enigmatic as though she knew twenty times more about boys than anyone else, or said she’d never met one who was half-way as interesting as her maths textbook. The girls said she was unreal, and she shrugged coolly. The really unreal thing was that she didn’t care in the least what they thought of her. She felt a hundred years older and wiser than this love-mad rabble in her class.

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

At the start of the novel, Abigail Kirk is shown to be a withdrawn and reserved girl who actively tries to go against trends, shirk status quos, and keep herself apart from her classmates, whom she sees as “love-mad” and ridiculous. Abigail delights in being different, and in being unmoved by the desire for human connection—or at least this is how she presents herself to her family, her friends, and the larger world around her. This demonstrates and foreshadows the struggle Abigail will come up against, and the ways in which she will be tested. Her worst fear is letting anybody else in, or being forced to conform to societal or social

☛☛ The May holidays always made [Abigail] feel forlorn and restless. [...] if her mother didn't want her to help at the shop, she spent hours squashed into the corner of the brown armchair, which had once been a kindly bear and now was only a bear-shaped chair near a window which looked out on cranes and mast tops, on the deck of the Harbour Bridge and the pearly cusps of the Opera House rising through the gauzy murk like Aladdin's palace. Mumping, her mother called it. But she was not doing that, or even thinking. Mostly she was just aware of something missing. When she was young she thought it was her father, for she had missed him miserably as well as hating him. [...] But now she wasn't a kid she knew that it wasn't the absence of her father that caused the empty place inside. It was a part of her and she didn't know what it was or why it was there.

Related Characters: Weyland Kirk, Grandmother, Katherine "Kathy" Kirk, Abigail Kirk

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5-6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Park demonstrates Abigail's ambivalence toward her surroundings. She lives in Sydney, a major cultural hub with both a complicated history and an ultra-modern, vibrant present; still, Abigail would rather shut herself up inside and nurse the "empty place" inside of herself than engage with the world around her. Abigail both wants for no one to know her, and for something to come along and make her feel whole, or complete—and these tensions will drive her character as the novel begins to unfold. Abigail does not know much about herself, though she seems to purport to. She wants to guard something that isn't even fully-formed, and which will only flourish with the very thing she wants to avoid: connection and love with other human beings.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ "Oh, I know all you schoolgirls think you know every last word in the book about the relationships between a man and a woman; but love is a thing you have to experience before you know—" she hesitated, and then blurted out—"how powerful it can be."

Related Characters: Katherine "Kathy" Kirk (speaker), Weyland Kirk, Abigail Kirk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

The first chapter established Abigail's withdrawn nature and slightly bitter demeanor. Abigail's desire to stave off connection originates largely in her father's betrayal. When he left Abigail and her mother to live with another woman, Abigail was so deeply hurt that she cultivated a disdain for love and connection and a staunch independence. Now, as Abigail's mother confesses that not only has she been secretly seeing Abigail's father, but she wants to accept his offer to live together once again as a family, Abigail lashes out at her mother, whom she sees as spineless and naïve. Abigail's mother, in this quotation, attempts to point out that it is Abigail who is being naïve—Abigail's guardedness is not wise, but foolish, and is ultimately harming and stunting her rather than helping her.

☛☛ Her eyes turned instinctively to the corner of the wall where it met the street. There lurked Natalie's little furry girl, looking cold and forlorn.

"She looks the way I feel," thought Abigail. But how did she feel? Not quite lost but almost. Baffled. A sense of too many strange ideas crowding around her, a feeling of helplessness and difficulty with which she could not come to terms. She thought, "Maybe they're right. Maybe there is such a thing as being too young and inexperienced to know your own mind."

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker), Beatie Bow / "The little furry girl", Natalie Crown

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

After a terrible fight with her mother over Kathy's desire to get back together with Weyland, Abigail leaves her mother's vintage shop in a fury and takes the bus home. Abigail considers that perhaps she has been too cruel to her mother, but before she can come to any real conclusion about how to apologize for her actions or get better in touch with her own feelings, she spots the strange little "furry" girl who her next door neighbor, Natalie Crown, has frequently seen observing the scary children's playground game, Beatie Bow. As Abigail watches the forlorn and

anxious little girl in the corner of the playground, Abigail wrestles with her own feelings of confusion and inadequacy. Abigail wonders if she is perhaps naïve, despite all her best efforts to be mature, guarded, and superior. It is in this vulnerable state that Abigail will pursue the little girl, and, in the face of all reason, wind up in a time that is not her own—more naïve and confused than ever before.

●● “What’s your name?”

“Beatie Bow.”

Abigail scowled. “Quit having me on, whoever you are. That’s the name of a kids’ game.”

“I ken that well enough. But it’s my name. Beatrice May Bow, and I’m eleven years of age, though small for it, I know, because of the fever.” Suddenly she grabbed Abigail’s arm. “Dunna tell, I’m asking you. Dunna tell Granny where you come from, or I’m for it. She’ll say I’ve the Gift and I havena, and don’t want it, God knows, because I’m afeared of what it does.”

Related Characters: Beatie Bow / “The little furry girl”, Abigail Kirk (speaker), Granny Tallisker

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

It is strange enough that Abigail Kirk, after following the little furry girl from the playground, finds herself in an unfamiliar place, and possibly even in another time, but the little girl also professes to be Beatie Bow, the titular figure of the odd and frightening playground game Abigail has witnessed many times. Even stranger is Beatie’s reference to a mysterious “Gift,” which clearly frightens her, and begs Abigail to help her hide the fact that she was able to travel to Abigail’s world and bring her back. There is more afoot than there seems to be, but Abigail will have to be patient if she wants to learn the full extent of what she’s gotten herself into.

Chapter 4 Quotes

●● “Do you have a good or a bad feeling about him, poor bairn?”

Granny sighed. “I hae no clear feelings any more, Dovey. They’re as mixed up as folk in fog.”

“But you’ve no doubt that this little one here is the Stranger?”

The two women spoke in whispers, but Abigail heard them, for the night was almost silent. There was no sound of traffic except a dray’s wheels rolling like distant thunder over the cobbles at the docks. She could hear the waves breaking on the rocks of Dawes Point and Walsh Bay.

“Aye, when I first saw her I had a flash, clear as it was when I was a lass. Poor ill-favoured little yellow herring of a thing. But still, it came to me then, she was the Stranger that would save the Gift for the family.”

Abigail was so indignant at the description of herself that she almost opened her eyes.

“And then there was the gown, forebye. I swear, Granny, I almost fainted when I set eyes on it. The very pattern that we worked out between us!”

“And not a needle lifted to it yet,” said Granny.

Related Characters: Granny Tallisker, Dorcas “Dovey” Tallisker (speaker), Abigail Kirk, Gibbie Bow

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Here Abigail listens to two of the women who have taken her in, Dovey and Granny, discuss the strange circumstances of her own arrival. It becomes clear that the Gift Beatie referenced earlier is of great import to these people. Abigail cannot understand what the two women are discussing, but it seems clear that something supernatural—or at least uncanny—is afoot. Abigail learns from their conversation that the clothing she was wearing at the time she passed into this world holds some connection to these two women—it contains a pattern that they had been planning on sewing, but hadn’t started yet—and that because of it, Abigail is seen as having a key role in whatever strange matter is happening to this family. Abigail has been thrust into an unfamiliar world and an unfamiliar role, where she is both powerful and powerless, wise and completely naïve.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ The first thing was their kindness. How amazingly widespread it was. [...] They had taken responsibility for her, nursed and clothed her. Someone had given up her bed, probably Beatie; no one had complained when she was snappish and rude about Dovey's best clothes, about the lack of sanitation; no one had condemned her unsympathetic attitude towards Gibbie.

"I'm not kind," said Abigail with a sickish surprise. "Look how I went on with Mum when she said she wanted us to get together with Dad again. Look what I did to Dad when I was little, punched him on the nose and made it bleed. Maybe I've never been really kind in my life." [...] These Victorians lived in a dangerous world, where a whole family could be wiped out with typhoid fever or smallpox, where a soldier could get a hole in his head that you could put your fist in, where there were no pensions or free hospitals or penicillin or proper education for girls, or even poor boys, probably. Yet, in a way, it was a more human world than the one Abigail called her own.

"I wish I could stay awhile," she thought, "and find out why all these things are. But I can't think about any of this till I get home. Getting home, that's what I have to plan."

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker), Beatie Bow / "The little furry girl", Gibbie Bow, Granny Tallisker, Dorcas "Dovey" Tallisker

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75-77

Explanation and Analysis

As Abigail spends more time with the Bows and the Talliskers, she finds herself surprised and warmed by their kindness and hospitality. Abigail knows that the two families have sacrificed enormously to keep her safe, comfortable, and well-taken-care-of, despite the fact that they do not know her at all. Abigail, seeing their kindness, considers the ways in which she herself has been unkind in the "real" world. She has so much more than the people who have taken her in, and yet she has attempted to keep herself cut off from people and has held long-standing grudges against those closest to her. Abigail, who has been plotting how she will escape the Bows, finds herself half-wishing she could stay longer—but having this thought would mean that she is feeling a desire for connection, so she quickly pushes it from her head and focuses once again on her selfish needs.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ "I've nothing to do with it!" cried Abigail. "I came here without wanting to and I want to go home. I've a life of my own, and I want to live it. My mother, I miss her, don't you understand?" she said chokily. She thought fiercely, "I won't cry, I won't." She waited for a moment, and then said quietly, "I'm not your mysterious Stranger. I'm just someone who came into your life here in some way that's a riddle to me. But I have to go home, I don't belong here. You must see that."

"We canna let you go," said Mrs. Tallisker. She had relinquished Abigail's hand and was sitting up against her pillows. Except for her sunken eyes she looked almost like her own dignified strong self again.

[...]

"But we canna let you go until you have done whatever it is the Stranger must do to preserve the Gift." Dovey was distressed. "Oh, dear Abby, it may only be for a little while and then we will help you go to your own place. We do understand what you feel, that you long for your ain folk, but we canna let you go . . . you are our only hope, you see."

Related Characters: Dorcas "Dovey" Tallisker, Granny Tallisker, Abigail Kirk (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 107-108

Explanation and Analysis

Abigail has found herself flung into a world in which she has a certain kind of power, responsibility, and status. She has felt the pull toward connection with the family that has taken her in, but as the significance of her role and the importance of her presence becomes clear, it is too much for Abigail, and she tries to push the duty—and the point of connection—far away. She is too important, though, and Granny and Dovey refuse to let her go. They are desperate to ensure the survival of something precious to their family—the mysterious "Gift"—and Abigail, whether she likes it or not, has been conscripted to that sacred duty. Abigail has no experience with wanting to fulfill a duty to her family—in her own life, she has tried to get emotionally as far away from them as possible—and so this scenario is her worst nightmare; nevertheless, she must live it out, and uphold her responsibility to this new, proxy family she has found herself an unwitting part of.

●● In a way she felt as she had felt when her father went away and left her. Fright, anger and helplessness, the sense of being nobody who could make things happen. But then she had been only ten. Four years of schooling her face to be expressionless, her thoughts to be her private property, had not gone to waste.

After her first despair, she thought, “I won’t let them beat me. If that dress is hidden around the house I’ll find it. Or I’ll bribe Beatie, or coax Judah, into telling me where it is.”

She had learnt a lot about herself in this new rough world. Her own thoughts and conclusions of just a month before filled her with embarrassed astonishment when she reviewed them.

“What a dummo I was! I knew as much about real life as poor little Natty.”

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker), Natalie Crown, Judah Bow, Beatie Bow / “The little furry girl”

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

At the start of this chapter, Abigail at last understands the weight of her duty to the Bow-Tallisker clan, but still wrestles with her feelings of being a captive, or a prisoner. Even so, Abigail concedes that being in the past—captive though she feels—has done her some good; she has learned much about herself, has formed new opinions and a new worldview, and has broadened her horizons in many ways. Abigail is torn, then, between wanting to stay in the past and continue learning, and going back to her own time and possibly forgetting or abandoning all she has learned. She does not want to go back to being a “dummo,” but still is not committed to her new, grown-up role as the possible savior of the Bow family Gift.

Chapter 8 Quotes

●● “I just want to go home, you know,” whispered Abigail. “You’re as restless as a robin, child,” said Mrs Tallisker. ‘But ‘twill not be long now.’”

There was a great difference in Mrs. Tallisker. She had, all at once, become older and smaller. Only a few weeks before she had towered, or so it seemed, over Abigail. Now Abigail was almost as tall. Her skin had crumpled more deeply, more extensively, like a slowly withering flower. She could not work as hard as before, but sat more often in the parlour with Gibbie, knitting thick grey socks for Judah.

“Aye,” she said with her sweet smile, as Abigail secretly stared at her, “’tis a fearful effort to give out the Power when it has decided to leave. If I could do what I did for you, child, you can give me a little of your time, inna that fair enough?”

“Yes, of course,” said Abigail, but in her heart she was grudging.

Related Characters: Granny Tallisker, Abigail Kirk (speaker), Judah Bow, Gibbie Bow

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

After Granny reveals that Abigail is the Stranger foretold of in a Prophecy, which states that the Bow-Tallisker Gift is being threatened by the death of one child and the barrenness of another, Abigail understands that she must stay in the past until her duty to the family is complete. She is not happy about it, though, and searches the house high and low for the green dress she was wearing when she arrived—the green dress that bears a crochet Granny will craft at some point in the near future, and is the magical object that allowed Abigail to traverse time itself. Granny catches Abigail in the midst of one of her searches and points out that she has done so much for Abigail that Abigail must stop trying to get away—Abigail owes it to Granny, and to all the Bows, to repay them for their kindness (and especially for saving her from the brothel) by helping them in their hour of need. Abigail, who has frequently been unkind and self-absorbed throughout her life, begrudgingly agrees that she must uphold her end of the bargain.

“’Tis here I live, do you see, in 1873, and my labour is here, and my own folk, and I'm thankful to God for both. So that's enough for me.”

“But men landing on the moon!” cried Abigail. “Don't you think that's fantastic?”

“Damned foolishness, I call it,” [Judah] said, and flushed. “Your pardon, Abby, for a word Granny would thicken my ear for, but 'tis no more and no less. What good to man or beast is that bare lump of rock?”

“At least it makes the tides,” snapped Abigail, “and where would you be without them?”

He laughed. “True for you, but no man has to go there to press a lever or turn a wheel for that!”

Having failed to interest him in the future, she turned to the past, and asked him was he ever homesick for Orkney, as she knew Dovey was.

“Not I,” he said. “Why, 'tis the past, and dead and gone. I'm a New South Welshman now, and glad about it, aye, gey glad!” His eyes danced. “Ah, I'm glad to be alive, and at this minute, I tell ye!”

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk, Judah Bow (speaker), Granny Tallisker

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Abigail is attempting to connect with Judah by regaling him with tales of the future. He cares little for her stories of her world, though—nothing about politics, culture, or innovation interests him. When Abigail attempts to engage Judah with a conversation as to his past, Judah claims that he does not care for anything that came before his present, either—he is radically committed to living only in the present moment, and focusing on the world, the people, and the feelings in his immediate vicinity. In a book so concerned with the impact of the past on the future—and indeed, the future on the past—Judah's views are iconoclastic and radical, marking him as one of the book's rare figures who is not obsessed, or even concerned, with the weight of time, history, and legacy. In this way he is also one of the happiest and healthiest characters of the book.

For an instant she remembered her mother's dark dewdrop eyes, as she said, “You don't know how powerful love can be,” and she thought how strange it was that love had made her both callous and tender. She did not care if this child died. Though she had never liked him, she had not wanted to deprive him of his life. But now, if his death meant that Judah lived, then she did not care a jot if he died. At the same time she did what would have made her skin creep a day or so before: she put her arms around his shivering, bony little body and held him comfortingly.

Related Characters: Judah Bow, Gibbie Bow, Katherine “Kathy” Kirk, Abigail Kirk

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

In a flurry of emotion and confusion, Abigail has realized that she is in love, and always has been, with Judah Bow. Abigail had thought herself immune to the madness of love, but now that she is in it, she sees how strong and transformative a force it truly is. As she comforts the melancholy, hypochondriac Gibbie in the night, she is shocked and a bit frightened of how her love for Judah has transformed her feelings towards others. The Prophecy Granny has seen foretells that one Bow child will die, and as Abigail sits with Gibbie, she finds herself praying it is him rather than Judah. She is amazed by how cruel this line of thinking is, but is also shocked by the twinned tenderness she feels toward Gibbie simply because he is connected to Judah. Love has made a mess out of her, and she is unsure of how to feel, how to act, or what to do with the new way love has made her see the world. Notably, she also thinks back to her own mother's words, and realizes how Kathy was right, and Abigail was more naïve than she thought.

Chapter 11 Quotes

“Stay awhile with us,” begged Dovey the next day, “for you're one of the family, Abby, true!”

“No,” said Abigail. “I have to go home; you know that.”

Her green dress looked strange to her; it had been so long since she had seen it. She saw it was not very well made; it was not worthy of the lace-like crochet. Abigail put on the dress. It fitted more tightly across the chest. My figure's coming at last, she thought. Inside she was cold and without feeling, like a volcano covered with ice.

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk, Dorcas “Dovey” Tallisker (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

After Abigail saves the Bows and the Talliskers from the fire Uncle Samuel set in the shop during one of his spells, she and the family all realize that her duty to them is complete, and the Prophecy has been fulfilled. Abigail was the Stranger all along, and she has saved all the Bows and allowed the Gift to continue on. It is time for her to go home, but as she prepares to leave, there is a sense of sadness that falls not over the Bows, but over Abigail, too. Dovey, despite all the tension between them, begs Abigail to stay, and though Abigail knows she must go, she describes a coldness that has come over her—a reluctance to leave, a sorrow for the things left unfulfilled in the past, and a fear of what awaits her back in the present.

☝ Abigail saw ahead of her the lamp that lit the steep stairs to the alley which ran down to the playground. Beatie kicked angrily at the kerbstone. Her face was undecided, back to its crabbed urchin look.

“I know you hate me because I fell in love with your brother. Well, he doesn't love me, never did and never will. And I did save Dovey for him.”

“’Twas no more than what you were sent for,” said Beatie churlishly.

Abigail lost her temper. “Oh, you know everything, don't you? Let me tell you, you sulky little pig, you know nothing about love, that's one thing. You have to experience it to know how powerful it is.”

Here she stopped, dumbstruck, remembering who had said the same words to her.

Related Characters: Beatie Bow / “The little furry girl”, Abigail Kirk (speaker), Dorcas “Dovey” Tallisker, Katherine “Kathy” Kirk, Judah Bow

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

As Abigail prepares to say goodbye to Beatie, she feels a sadness and a tenderness toward the girl who has been such a strange, powerful force in her life. Beatie still harbors ill will, or at least conflicting feelings, toward Abigail, and does not want to wish her a goodbye that betrays any feelings of love or gratitude. Abigail, frustrated by Beatie's desire to push her away—the very behaviors Abigail espoused at the start of the novel—attempts to explain to Beatie how naïve she is to the ways of love, and how important and transformative feelings of romance are. Abigail is then shocked to find that she has at last come to understand the value and truth of the words her own mother spoke to her not so long ago. Abigail has grown and changed over the course of the novel, and where she once looked down on love and connection, the two feelings have become her saving grace, and matters of great importance to her both emotionally and logistically.

☝ In a flash the study vanished and Abigail was on a ship. The waves ran along the side, leaping and hissing. They were as grey as marble. The ship rolled and creaked. There was a drumming from up in the air, where the wet sails flickered out showers of salty drops. But she felt no movement. Muffled in his pea-jacket, a woolen cap on his bright head, Judah sat on a roll of canvas, mending some ship's gear, or so she thought. He had not got older as Beatie had.

“Judah!” she cried joyfully, but he did not look up. The pulley and rope in his fingers changed to a knife and a little wooden figure he was whittling. Somehow she knew it was herself. With an exclamation she could not hear, he tossed it overboard, where it turned into Abby herself, clad in Dovey's blouse and serge skirt, rising stiffly up and down in the waves like a statue or a ship's figurehead.

“Oh, Judah,” sobbed Abigail, “how could you?”

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker), Judah Bow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

The night she returns home from 1873, Abigail attempts to push the feelings of sorrow and longing she has for all of the Bows, but especially for Judah, out of her mind, and focus on the happiness of being back in her own time, with her mother. However, in dreams Abigail experiences a series of

frightening visions that are never revealed to be either true or false. She sees Samuel Bow locked in a mental asylum, Beatie in morning clothes, and lastly she sees Judah, whittling a wooden figure—which seems to be a likeness of Abigail herself—before throwing it overboard, where it turns into Abigail herself, clothed in Dovey’s constricting and ugly garments. This dream—or vision—seems to symbolize Abigail’s feelings of having been swallowed or eclipsed by Dovey. The dream also hints that perhaps Judah worries that he made the wrong choice, and that his true feelings lie with Abigail—though he attempts to literally drown these thoughts, just as Abigail herself is trying to push Judah from her own mind.

☞ It was amazing, terrifying, that all signs of the family's life could have so completely vanished, as if they had never been. It was as if time were a vast black hole which swallowed up all trace of human woes and joys and small hopes and tenderesses. And the same thing would happen to her and her parents.

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

After Abigail wanders the empty Rocks district just hours after her return, filled with longing for the Bows, she is filled with a sense of despondency, and the familiar emptiness from the book’s first chapter overtakes her. She feels that nothing she did mattered—not only that, but nothing the Bows did or experienced in their long, complicated line of magic and mischief matters now, either. She feels as if she has had an enormous experience that she cannot share with anyone, and fears that her own life will soon be swallowed by time and rendered completely irrelevant as well.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ “Now then, start from the very beginning and tell me about everything. Did you go to Oslo University? Did you have any romances with glamorous Norwegians?”

“Oh, three or four.” Abigail smiled. “They’re irresistible people. Not serious though.”

“You’ll die being back in this old mundane place,” said Justine.

“No, not at all. Oh, it seems a bit hot and bright after those northern countries, but I’m going to finish my degree at Sydney University. I’ll soon get used to it, and everything that happened in the last four years will seem like a fairy-tale.”

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk, Justine Crown (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Abigail has just returned to her old apartment in Sydney after living abroad with her parents for several years. When she visits her old neighbor Justine Crown, Justine asks Abigail to regale her with stories of her love affairs. Abigail concedes coyly that she did get involved with a few people. Even this modest admission reveals a major change in Abigail; the young woman who was so disdainful of romance and so closed off from other people in the early pages of the novel has become someone who actually enjoys human connection, finding it “irresistible” at times. Abigail has grown through the transformative power of her love not just for Judah, but for all the Bows, and now is a more whole person with a healthier approach to human relationships, both romantic and platonic.

“The Bible was a mighty volume. The green plush had hardly any pile left at all; the brass edges were black and bent. They had not been polished for many years.

“Justine had it at the top of the linen cupboard. It belonged to some old great-great aunt or such. She used to be headmistress at Fort Street School, you know the old building up near the Observatory that the National Trust has now?”

“So she made it, the little stirrer!” crowed Abigail. She beamed at Robert, who gaped at her.

‘She wasn’t any little stirrer; she was a perfect old tartar. Mother remembered her quite well; she was in an old ladies’ home or something. Mother was petrified with terror of her, she said.’

“Old Miss Bow!” Abigail laughed marvelling. “Who would have guessed it? I guess that’s how that kids’ game sprang up . . . terror lest Miss Beatie Bow would rise from the grave and give them all what for.”

Related Characters: Robert Bow , Abigail Kirk (speaker), Beatie Bow / “The little furry girl”

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Here Abigail sits down with Robert, Justine Crown’s brother who is revealed to be a direct descendant of the Bows, to pore over the Bow family Bible. Abigail is then delighted to realize that Beatie Bow did become famous after all—and became famous for her passion. Recalling fondly how combative, volatile, and fiery Beatie was in her youth, Abigail can only imagine what kind of headmistress Beatie was. She finds herself marveling with glee at how time is both unpredictable and predictable, uncanny and aligned with a perfect sense of destiny. Abigail and Beatie from the start had a contentious relationship, which only grew more and more strained and imperfect, and yet after all this time Abigail is able to rejoice in Beatie’s iron will, indomitable persona, and strength of heart.

“Natalie has something to do with this, hasn’t she,” he pondered. “Because, after all, she’s a Bow, and perhaps she has the Gift. And the crochet, because it came from the fingers of that Great-great-great-grandmother Alice from the Orkneys, was just enough to tip you over into the last century. She was right, you know: you were the Stranger of the Prophecy.”

Related Characters: Robert Bow (speaker), Granny Tallisker, Abigail Kirk, Natalie Crown

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

As Robert Bow listens to Abigail’s story of her time in the past living with the Bows and the Talliskers, he is surprisingly on board with her tale, and believes her every word. More than that, he is enthusiastic about filling in the gaps and piecing together the many pieces of his family’s strange puzzle. He recognizes that his niece, Natalie, is blessed with the precious gift of the second sight, and marvels at the pivotal, instrumental role that Abigail played in preserving his family’s history, legacy, and lineage. Abigail herself has many times tried to push the significance of her time with the Bows from her mind, but now, through the eyes of another, she can see just how important she was all along, and how fated the events of her fourteenth year truly were.

“You would have liked Granny Tallisker,” said Abigail. She sighed. “You won’t care for mine, she’s even worse than she used to be.”

She was silent, thinking of that old woman, Alice Tallisker, her infinite goodness and strength, and how she had said that the link between Abigail and the Talliskers and Bows was no stronger than the link between that family and Abigail. The theory she had had when wandering The Rocks four years before - that time was a great black vortex down which everything disappeared - no longer made sense to her. She saw now that it was a great river, always moving, always changing, but with the same water flowing between its banks from source to sea.

Related Characters: Abigail Kirk (speaker), Granny Tallisker

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

When Abigail first returned from the past, she despaired of how it seemed as if the Bows and the Talliskers were lost to time, swallowed by a black hole that blotted out and eradicated any and all impact, physical and emotional, they’d had on the world around them. Now, though, having

realized that Justine and Robert, and indeed Vincent and Natalie, are all descendants of the Bows and heirs to their legacy, Abigail sees that time has not abandoned the Bows. They live on physically through their descendants, and

emotionally through Abigail herself. Time is a complicated thing, frightening and untamable, but also faithful to its own footprint and all the many strange, disparate, and beautiful lives and events it holds within it.



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

Fourteen-year-old Abigail Kirk was originally, as an infant, christened Lynette, a name which her mother Katherine regrets giving her, as she finds it ugly. For the first ten years of her life, “Lynnie” Kirk was “happy as a lark,” hot-headed but devoted to her parents—especially her father, whom she saw as a “king.” When Abigail’s father Weyland left her and her mother and went off with another woman, he promised Lynnie that he would come home often, but in response Lynnie hit her father on the nose. After he left, Lynnie commanded her mother to never call her by her name again.

Katherine tried to explain to her daughter that just because her father wanted to leave their marriage, his departure had no effect on his love for Lynnie, but the girl only retreated further and further into herself, refusing to answer to her given name. Things only got worse when Kathy sold their family home and moved into an apartment unit that Weyland—an architect—had given to her. Her daughter was incensed that Kathy would have accepted such a gift, despite the fact that the apartment was a fine, expansive unit in a high-rise tower in Sydney.

“The ex-Lynette” eventually stumbled upon a new name through her grandmother, with whom she had a contentious relationship. After “ex-Lynette”’s grandmother complained to Kathy that Kathy’s daughter had become “a little witch,” the girl decided she wanted a witch’s name, and selected Abigail as her new name, despite her mother’s protestations. Abigail took the name and vowed that when she was old enough, she would change her surname as well.

Abigail, now fourteen, is a thin, plain girl who is studious and clever but reserved and quiet. She is not very well-liked at school, and the other children think she is odd because she shirks trends and has no interest in boys, but Abigail does not mind—on the inside, she feels “a hundred years older and wiser than this love-mad rabble in her class.” She purposefully hides the truth of herself away from everyone, including her mother, and cultivates an expressionless, bland exterior. Lately, Abigail has been longing for someone to share her secrets with, though she admits to herself that even she does not know what the secrets of her inner self truly are.

The novel’s opening paragraphs describe how Abigail, as a child, was a completely different person from who she is today—her name change is reflective of the vast changes she has undergone. Abigail’s abandonment of her given name—and thus, symbolically, of her past—shows how the girl has a flippant relationship with history and legacy as the story begins.



The beginning of the novel sets up Abigail’s difficult and strained relationship to the concept of family, and of duty toward one’s own kin. Abigail is eager to cut out a family member who has wounded her, and she wants to make even the thought of reconciliation a difficult one.



Abigail wants to distance herself from members of her family who have wronged her, but also from those who haven’t. Abigail picks a strange name that no one else likes in order to individuate herself from the rest of her family, beginning a years-long process of removing herself emotionally from those around her.



Abigail does everything in her power to set herself apart not just from her family, but from her peers at school as well. Abigail, as a product of her father’s betrayal, looks down on any form of love and wants to believe that she could never fall victim to the “madness” that feelings of love engender. Despite her aloofness, Abigail has of late found herself longing for more, but pushes these feelings away and attempts to bury them.



The May holidays arrive—they always make Abigail feel “forlorn and restless,” and rather than helping her mother at her antiques shop she spends her days sulking about the house. Abigail is profoundly aware that something is missing. When she was younger, she always assumed it was her father—despite her hatred for him, she missed him terribly. Now that Abigail is older, she begins to realize that the “empty place inside” of her is not due to her father’s absence—it is a part of her, and she does not know what it is, or why it is there.

Abigail has a close friendship with her mother. Back when their family all lived together in the suburbs, Kathy had collected and kept vintage and antique odds and ends. After Weyland left, Kathy rented a storefront on a high street and opened an antiques shop called Magpies, which has become popular over the years.

Abigail, bored and lonely, gets up from her brown armchair and goes to visit the Crowns, her neighbors. Justine Crown is the mother of four-year-old Natalie and six-year-old Vincent. Natalie is sweet, but Vincent is a monster. Abigail feels protective of Natalie, who often has fevers and nightmares. As soon as the Crowns’ door swings open, Vincent teases Abigail for having “Dracula teeth.” He asks his sister, calling her “Fat Nat,” if she can see them too. Despite herself, Abigail instantly becomes self-conscious, listing in her head all the things she does not like about herself—most of all, her flat and narrow figure.

Abigail steels herself against the monstrous Vincent’s nagging and offers Justine to take the two to the playground for a while, so Justine can have some peace. As Abigail leads the children out of the building, she cannot help but admire a plaque in the lobby which lists her father, Weyland Kirk, as an architect of the Mitchell building.

Down at the playground, a harsh wind is blowing. Vincent runs off immediately to play with the other children gathered there, most of whom also live in Mitchell. Abigail observes the children “racing dementedly back and forth,” clearly playing some kind of group game. Abigail asks Natalie if she would like to join the game, but Natalie shakes her head and begins to cry. Natalie tells Abigail that the game the children are playing is called “Beatie Bow,” and it scares her—nevertheless, Natalie says, she likes to watch.

Abigail has tried to suppress the emptiness that her removal from her family and her peers created in her. She cannot ignore it, though, and as she reckons with how lately this emptiness has taken hold of her and become nearly unbearable, she becomes frightened to realize that its cause, and thus its cure, are completely unknown.



Kathy’s shop demonstrates the fact that Abigail’s mother, unlike Abigail herself, has an interest in and a respect for history, legacy, and the past.



Despite the fact that Abigail tells herself she does not need connection with other people, she nonetheless seeks it out in her next-door neighbors, longing to be a part of a whole family. Even though she can see the flaws in the Crown family, she again and again returns voluntarily to them, offering her babysitting services to Justine.



This passage shows, again, how despite Abigail’s self-professed hatred of her father and desire to keep him away from her, she cannot help longing, on some level, for a point of connection with the man.



The strange game Beatie Bow is shown to have a power over Natalie, Vincent, and their playmates. Abigail is curious about the game, and especially intrigued by the fact that though the game scares Natalie, she still wants to be near it.



Abigail and Natalie watch the game—a girl stands in the middle of a circle of children, playing the figure of a mother, or “Mudda.” A child makes a scraping sound, and the others then ask “Mudda” what the noise is—she insists it’s just the dog at the door. A second child makes a horrible moan, and the others ask what the noise is—“Mudda” replies that it is just the wind. A third child drops rocks on the ground, and Mudda tells the chorus of children that it is only “the cow in the byre, the horse in the stall.” At this point, Natalie puts her hands over her eyes. Mudda then points past the circle of children—a girl in a white sheet is walking toward them. Mudda cries that Beatie Bow has risen from the dead, and the circle of children breaks—they begin shrieking and running across the playground.

Natalie explains that if the person playing Beatie Bow catches someone, that person then becomes the next Beatie Bow. Natalie tells Abigail that the game does actually frighten many of the children who play it, since so often they stay and play after dark. The only girl who never seems to get scared, Natalie says, is a “little furry girl” who always stands in the corner of the playground and watches.

Vincent approaches Abigail and asks if he can play once more—Abigail tells him that it is time to go home, and it is already too cold for Natalie. Vincent makes a rude gesture at the two girls and then runs back into the building’s lobby. Abigail follows him in, and as she stands with him waiting for the elevator, she can see that he is trembling all over. Abigail decides to tell Justine about the “too-exciting game” Vincent has been playing.

Inside the apartment, Abigail offers to stay until dinner so that she can entertain Natalie while Justine cooks and gets ready for dinner. Justine suggests Abigail help Natalie sew some new **clothes** for her teddy bear, knowing that Abigail enjoys sewing and makes many of her own clothes. Abigail’s grandmother hates all the clothes she makes, and often comments on their ugliness, but Abigail’s mother defends Abigail’s creativity.

Abigail and Natalie pick through a bag of fabric, testing swatches against Natalie’s teddy. Abigail tells Natalie about a **dress** she has nearly finished for herself, made from an old Edwardian curtain. As the two girls sift through the fabrics, Abigail spots a strangely-shaped piece of yellow crochet—it is very fine work, nearly like lace. Justine comes into the room, and, seeing Abigail with the rag, asks for it, saying she’ll use it as a dishcloth or something—it’s been around forever. Abigail, though, asks if she can keep it—it will be just the right yoke for her new high-necked Edwardian curtain dress.

The game is revealed to be a rather macabre spectacle that escalates in scariness and anticipatory excitement until the ghost of Beatie Bow is finally revealed to be hungry for the “souls” of other children. The unsettling nature of the game puzzles Abigail, especially because despite its dark nature the children playing it seem ecstatic, exuberant, and completely engaged.



The unsettling game is bookended by the fact that Natalie often sees a strange little girl in the corner of the playground. This scene serves to introduce a sort of magic, or at least a small hint of the supernatural, into the narrative.



Vincent has clearly become over-excited by the game, a fact that further disturbs Abigail. Perhaps more unsettling than the children’s reaction to the game is the fact that their knowledge of it differentiates them from her—they hold a kind of knowledge or wisdom that allows them to create their own little world, or perhaps to connect to another world altogether.



This passage introduces Abigail’s affinity for making clothing, which will become a major symbol throughout the novel, representing the similarities that can be found, against all odds, between people from vastly different worlds. Here, Abigail plans to help Natalie make clothes for her teddy—clothes are a bridge between Abigail and Natalie, who are different but still care for one another.



Despite Abigail’s relative apathy toward the past, she is proud of a dress she is making from some old fabric. Clothes are shown here to be a bridge—even a tentative one—between Abigail and the idea of a relationship to history and legacy. When Abigail uncovers the shabby crochet in Justine’s grab-bag and decides it would look perfect on her new dress, she is again using clothes, and the making of them, as a point of connection.



Abigail says goodbye to the Crowns and heads home, where she carefully washes and dries the fabric. Abigail examines the pattern more closely and sees that it is a design of a delicate plant with a flower rising up out of five heart-shaped leaves. Between two leaves, Abigail makes out two tiny initials: A.T. When Kathy arrives home, she admires the piece of crochet and offers to sell it in the shop, but Abigail declines. Abigail stitches the yoke to her **dress**, trying to make the stitches as fine as she can. As she works, she realizes she has seen the flower in a book before—it is called Parnassus Grass. Abigail heads to bed and floats easily off to sleep. She dreams of the smell of burnt sugar, and a closed door with an iron fist for a knocker; tied to the door knocker is a yellow rag.

The description of the pattern on the crochet, and Abigail's careful handling of it and interest in it, furthers the idea of clothing as a way for Abigail to connect with the world around her. Despite the ways Abigail is stunted in terms of making connections, clothes help her to connect with the past, with other people's legacies, and with her own family, as she and her mother share an interest in this one object. Abigail's peculiar dream at the end of the chapter serves to heighten the slightly magical bent of the story and foreshadow something both intriguing and unsettling.



CHAPTER 2

At breakfast, Kathy admires Abigail's new dress, and chatters on and on happily. When Abigail asks her mother what she's so happy about, Kathy confesses that she had dinner with Weyland last night. The two had never been officially divorced, and they have seen each other a few times a year each year since their split. Weyland takes Abigail out every once in a while as well, but there is an awkwardness and the lingering memory of rejection between them.

Abigail's mother has maintained a distant but consistent relationship with her daughter's father, seemingly for practical purposes rather than romantic ones. Weyland's attempts to have a similar relationship with Abigail have failed, as she has stewed bitterly every time she has seen him over the years.



Abigail asks her mother if she had just run into Weyland, but Kathy confesses that she has seen her husband quite a few times recently. She apologizes for lying to Abigail, and then tells her daughter that Weyland wants for them all to be a family again. Abigail is filled with a "burning wave of dismay." She inquires pointedly about "Miss Thingo," the woman for whom Weyland left Kathy and Abigail behind—Kathy reminds Abigail that Weyland's mistress, Jan, left him a year ago. Kathy begs Abigail to take the situation seriously, and really consider letting Weyland back into their lives.

Abigail's mother admits that she has "betrayed" her daughter in favor of her husband. The power of romantic love, a major theme throughout the novel, is shown for the first time as Kathy's love of her husband at least momentarily seems to outweigh her allegiance and duty to her daughter.



Abigail is shocked and disappointed to realize that her mother is considering Weyland's proposal in earnest, but Kathy insists that Abigail cannot understand love yet—she has not experienced it, and does not know how powerful it can be. Abigail accuses her mother of having no self-respect. Kathy insists that she has always loved Weyland, despite how he has hurt her and Abigail, and wants to try to make things work. She also reveals to Abigail that Weyland wants the two of them to travel with him to Norway, where he is about to embark on a three-year architectural study.

Abigail believes that her derisive attitude towards love is mature and subversive—she has not seen, up until this moment, how it could be seen as deeply childish and naïve. Abigail thinks that her mother is the childish one, but really Kathy is trying to act out of pure, genuine love, as well as a sense of duty towards keeping her family together.



This is too much for Abigail—she is seized by jealousy and anger, and tells her mother that even though Kathy might want to put herself in a situation where she could get “dumped” a second time, Abigail herself will not do such a thing. Kathy protests, exclaiming that she could never leave Abigail in Australia at her age—and Abigail is struck by the realization that if it came down to a choice, her mother would choose Weyland. Abigail coolly tells her mother that she would rather live on her own at boarding school than go to Norway, and then she goes to her bedroom and slams the door.

Kathy taps on Abigail’s bedroom door and attempts to get her to come back out, but Abigail ignores her mother’s quiet pleas. After she hears her mother leave for work, Abigail dons her new green **dress**, and instantly feels a little bit better. The more she thinks about her sappy mother, though, the angrier she gets—she can’t believe her mother would abandon Abigail and the shop for love. Abigail rages and sulks throughout the house, unable to picture herself living in Norway, but fighting off the sinking feeling that her mother is going to move there no matter what.

Later that afternoon, Abigail heads over to the Crowns’. She tells Justine she is bored, and offers to take the children to the playground. Justine tells her to just take Natalie—Vincent is ill with a sore throat. When Justine notices Abigail’s **dress**, she asks her if it is the old rag—the family lace—that she has sewn to the yoke, but their conversation is interrupted by Vincent’s moaning.

On the way down to the playground, Natalie tells Abigail that she was able to see the little furry girl on the playground from all the way up in the apartment. Natalie is a much happier child without her brother around, but still is drawn to watching the frightening games of Beatie Bow. As the game begins, Natalie points out the little furry girl to Abigail—Abigail notices the little girl, who is pale and dressed in a **pinafore**, with close-clipped hair that looks like cat’s fur.

Natalie suggests they go speak to the little girl. As they approach her, Abigail notices that she is probably eleven, but small for her age—she is barefoot, and the skin on her feet is cracking and peeling. Natalie says hello to the child, who is instantly startled; the furry girl flees down the alleyway. Natalie instantly begins to cry. Abigail returns Natalie to her apartment, and as she hugs Abigail goodbye, Natalie tells her that the little furry girl has known much unhappiness. Abigail asks Natalie how she knows—Natalie says she just does.

Abigail is hurt by the fact that her mother, seemingly so overwhelmed by love for Weyland, would choose the pursuit of that love over her duty to her own daughter. Abigail acts as she always does in moments such as these, and shuts herself off from her mother both emotionally and physically rather than engage further in a painful discussion.



Abigail's dress is the only thing that brings her comfort at this time of pain, confusion, and hurt. As clothing symbolizes connection to the past, Abigail's drawing comfort from the garment perhaps symbolizes her desire to retreat to an earlier time, before this argument with her mother—or perhaps escape the demands of her present situation altogether.



As she tends to do in moments of unstable connection to her own family, Abigail seeks connection with the Crown family instead, a choice that allows her to feel a semblance of familial love without having to face the difficulties that come along with it.



The little furry girl at the playground has some kind of connection to the game of Beatie Bow—it entrances her, but she will not play it, very similarly to Natalie’s own reaction to the game. The little furry girl’s antiquated pinafore symbolizes her connection to another time.



Natalie has a strange and confusing connection to the little furry girl—she is drawn to her, and seems to understand her feelings intimately and profoundly. Nevertheless, the little furry girl also upsets Natalie—just like the game Beatie Bow does.



Abigail returns to her own apartment, where she argues some more with her mother about Weyland's proposition. Kathy berates Abigail for never once having considered how her mother might feel about things, and only ever focusing on her own emotions. Kathy tells Abigail that she will not let her daughter stand in the way of her own happiness, and then hurries off to the bathroom and locks herself in.

In the morning, there is a stony coldness between Kathy and Abigail, but Abigail nonetheless agrees to help out at the shop for the weekend. As the days go by, the two exchange barely a word. Abigail is deeply upset, and the only thing that makes her feel a little bit better is her new green **dress**. When Kathy yells at Abigail for constantly stroking the fabric, Abigail grabs an old shawl, throws it around her shoulders, and runs away from the shop. As Abigail rides the bus home, she realizes how cruel and thoughtless she has been toward her mother, and begins crying.

When Abigail gets off the bus, she passes the playground. Darkness is falling, and many children are being called in for supper. Abigail again sees the little furry girl in the corner of the playground, and thinks that she does look rather forlorn; the way Abigail feels on the inside. As she watches the little girl, she is reminded of Natalie. She approaches the little girl and startles her with a "Boo." The little girl shouts at Abigail in a hoarse Scottish accent, claiming that she wasn't doing anything, she was only watching the children play. She says something about not wanting "it" to be true, and then hurriedly runs away.

Abigail follows the little girl down an unfamiliar alleyway, calling after her, promising that all she wants to do is talk. Abigail catches up with the little girl as the alleyway opens up into a road. Down in the city, the Town Hall clock chimes six. Abigail follows the girl into the road, and is amazed when suddenly she hears horse's hooves and sees that the street lights have been replaced with lamps holding candles. A horse-drawn cab nearly hits the stunned Abigail, who believes she is dreaming. Abigail observes strange, foreign-looking women and dirty, ragged children as she runs through the streets; one child throws a half-decayed rabbit's head at her feet. Though Abigail is disoriented and unsure of where she is, she knows one thing—the little furry girl, whoever she is, will be able to tell her.

As Abigail and her mother fight, Kathy rightfully points out how self-centered Abigail is being. However, Kathy also mirrors her daughter's immature and escapist behavior by shutting herself in the bathroom at the argument's highest emotional point.



Still pained by her contentious relationship with her mother, Abigail again turns to the green dress for comfort. Though one would think that Kathy would be happy to see her daughter embracing a connection to history, Kathy instead lashes out at Abigail—perhaps for avoiding the situation at hand—and winds up driving her daughter away.



In the absence of a connection to her mother, Abigail attempts to connect to the odd little girl in the corner of the playground. The little girl responds strangely by attempting to escape, piquing Abigail's interest. Abigail seeks out others in moments of disrupted connection with her own family, so as the little furry girl rejects Abigail's attempt at connection, it follows that Abigail will continue to pursue the girl despite her protestations.



This scene is the book's first explicit and major shift into the realm of the supernatural or fantastical. Abigail's pursuit of connection to and information from the little furry girl has led her somewhere strange and foreign. Abigail knows that something is wrong, but also has no way of going back that she can see, and so follows the furry girl further and further into the night. Abigail is now reliant on the wisdom—and, seemingly, the power—that she believes the little girl possesses.



CHAPTER 3

Though the little furry girl tries to lose Abigail as she winds through the streets and alleyways, Abigail pursues her—sometimes, when the little girl turns around to see if Abigail is still on her tail, her face is “distorted with panic.” The houses on the streets are closely cramped together, and as the night sky darkens above, Abigail’s path is lit only by dim lights from within the residences.

Abigail finally catches up with the furry girl, but stops when she encounters a beggar with a wooden stump for a leg and becomes frightened. She presses on, and soon she is on Argyle Street—though it is a street she has walked a thousand times, she does not recognize it. Abigail runs through the slums, and as she does, people stare at her.

Abigail pursues the furry girl to the doorway of a corner shop, and a familiar smell of burnt sugar stops her in her tracks. She hears chaotic noises coming from within, and then a tall figure—a man—bounds out of the doorway, screaming nonsense about “heathen devils” and knocking Abigail over as he runs into the street. Abigail hits her head hard on the edge of the doorstep. Other people burst from the doorway to come to her aid, but Abigail promptly faints.

Abigail awakens, but keeps her eyes shut, sensing that she is somewhere strange and foreign. She can smell a fire going in the room, and is aware that someone is holding her hand. She hears a woman’s voice, speaking in the same Scottish accent as the little furry girl, urge another person named Dovey to change Abigail’s bandage so that they can see how bad her head is.

As hands move over her head, Abigail stays still and keeps her eyes shut. She feels confused and sick, and has a terrible pain in her ankle. She does not believe she is dreaming, but wonders briefly if she has gone out of her mind. Abigail listens as the women agree that her wound is clean, and discuss checking up on someone called Uncle Samuel, to see if he is “himself again.” The two women muse aloud that Abigail must be a lady, due to her soft hands and clean nails. Abigail’s ankle throbs, and she lets out a series of yelps and cries. At last, she opens her eyes and looks around the room. Above her is “one of the sweetest faces she ha[s] ever seen”—that of a young girl with a soft complexion.

Abigail is somewhere new, strange, and disorienting. The little furry girl is the only connection she can see between where she came from and where she is now, and she clings to the idea that the girl has some kind of wisdom that will allow her to better understand her situation.



Abigail finds that though she is in the same place she was just moments ago, she is not, it seems, in the same time.



Abigail dreamed of burnt sugar a few nights ago, and now finds herself in front of a confectionery, with the smell she dreamt of in the air. Abigail is further disoriented when an apparent madman knocks her over, stopping her in her tracks and waylaying her pursuit of the furry girl.



Abigail does not know where she is, and as she attempts to orient herself as to her new surroundings, she employs the technique she has practiced for years—keeping her exterior completely unreadable.



Abigail reaches a point at which she cannot contain what is going on inside of her any longer—she is in pain, and she is frightened, and she needs to know where she is and what is going on. The conversation happening around her is too strange, and as the women tending to her speculate about who she is, Abigail becomes fearful of the way they’re talking about her.



The sweet-faced girl offers Abigail a sip of posset—a drink made of hot milk curdled with alcohol—promising that it will be good for her pain. Abigail drinks from the goblet of posset and is almost instantly lulled back into a drowsy, warm slumber. When she awakes again, she believes she is alone—her clothes have been replaced with a long, thick, uncomfortable **nightdress**. There is a warm compress against her ankle, and the furry girl is sitting on a stool beside her, so close that Abigail can see her freckles and her “excited” eyes. She sees that the little girl has a fierce, resolute face, and hands covered in scars and burns. Abigail struggles to maintain a calm exterior, and not let on that she is as confused, disoriented, and frightened as she really is.

Abigail asks if a man with a sword really knocked her over in the street, and the little girl replies sadly that the man was her own father, who has “spells” of madness. Abigail asks the little girl her name, and she replies that it is Beatie Bow. Abigail tells the girl to stop joking—Beatie Bow is the name of a children’s game—but Beatie insists that this is her name: Beatrice May Bow. She tells Abigail that she is eleven years old, but small for her age due to a childhood fever. Beatie seizes Abigail’s arm and begs her not to tell Granny where she herself comes from—Beatie does not want Granny to assume that she has the “Gift.” She does not want it, she says, and is “afraid” of what it does.

Abigail asks where they are, and Beatie tells her that she is in the best room of her father’s house, behind the confectionary shop. Abigail asks what country they are in, and Beatie, flabbergasted, replies that they are in the colony of New South Wales. Abigail sobs, unable to understand anything that is happening to her, and wishing for her mother and father.

Beatie tells Abigail that she knows she shouldn’t have gone to watch the children’s game, but couldn’t help herself when she heard the children chanting her name—Beatie insists that she “didna know it could be done.” Abigail believes Beatie is talking in riddles. Beatie again urges Abigail to promise her that she won’t tell Granny how she found herself in this world, and threatens to punch Abigail “yeller and green” if she does not comply.

Abigail's green dress has been taken from her and replaced with an uncomfortable new garment. Abigail's connection to where she came from has been replaced with something new, which signifies only discomfort and disorientation, and Abigail fears that all connection has been lost—until she sees the little furry girl at the edge of her bed, and realizes that she is not entirely unmoored from her previous reality.



Abigail at last realizes that she is face-to-face—and has been all along—with the famous Beatie Bow. Abigail is just as confused to why Beatie is the subject of the game as Beatie herself seems to be, but it is clear that Beatie, having meddled in time, is afraid of what her dalliance in the future has caused, both for herself and for Abigail.



Beatie holds the wisdom Abigail needs, but even as Beatie gives her the answers she has so wanted, Abigail finds herself unable to understand what is happening to her—Abigail's own sense of power is greatly diminished.



Beatie is both frightened and fiery in this passage, vacillating quickly between vulnerability and superiority as she attempts to explain to Abigail what has transpired, and the fact that she has seemingly traveled through time itself.



An old woman and a young one enter the room—the younger girl limps, while the old woman stands tall and proud, “like a fairy godmother.” The old woman embraces Abigail and rocks her gently, and Abigail senses a profound goodness emanating from her. Abigail relaxes into Granny’s embrace, and Granny tells Beatie to go fetch Judah. A few minutes later, a tall young man enters the room and reports that his father is full of sorrow and fear over what he has done to Abigail. Judah urges Dovey to go look after him, then comes and sits next to Abigail. Granny tells Judah that she is afraid that his father will be in trouble if Abigail is truly injured, for Abigail is a lady. Abigail insists that she is not a lady, and sinks into her pillows, distraught.

Judah offers Abigail a candy, and she sits up and accepts it. She looks around the room, and recognizes many items from her mother’s vintage shop. She sees a picture of Queen Victoria on the wall, and asks why there is a portrait of her and not Queen Elizabeth hanging; when Granny remarks that Abigail is confused, and that Queen Bess died “hundreds of years ago,” Abigail realizes that she is in Queen Victoria’s time—far in the past. She urges herself to stay calm, and not give herself away.

Abigail asks to be helped over to the window, so that she can see where she is. Judah lifts her from her bed and brings her over to the shuttered window, and then instructs Beatie to open the shutters wide. As Abigail looks down at the street below, she marvels at how none of the buildings of modern-day Sydney have yet been constructed. Once again miserable and frightened, Abigail leans her face into Judah’s chest, and asks what year it is. Judah replies that it’s nearly the end of 1873, and then puts her back in the bed.

Dovey tucks Abigail back in, lamenting the fact that the poor girl seems to have lost her memory. Granny and Dovey speculate about where Abigail could have come from. Dovey believes Abigail to be an immigrant from a fine family, but Granny mutters something about Abigail being a “stranger.” As the two women continue their conversation at the door to the room, Beatie creeps closer to Abigail, staring at her with big eyes. Abigail whispers accusatorily to Beatie, telling her that she is the reason Abigail is here, but Beatie insists that it was Abigail who chose to follow her.

Just as Abigail seems to be able to comprehend a part of what is happening her, more new elements to the situation are introduced. Abigail, realizing that she must be in the presence of a large, complex family, becomes overwhelmed, and even a little bit angry that no one seems to be listening to her or believing her.



Abigail again employs her tactic of keeping her exterior calm even as her interior drifts into chaos. She realizes that she is further back in the past than she had imagined—so far back that the antiquated treasures she had always overlooked are now coming back to haunt her, forming her immediate present.



The truth of the realization that Beatie is not even in the twentieth century shocks Abigail. The version of Sydney she loves and has always taken for granted is gone, and in its place is a wild world that is completely unrecognizable, and thus deeply frightening to her.



In the midst of all Abigail’s confusion, sadness, and disorientation, her contentious relationship with Beatie manages to come to the forefront. The girls seem to distrust one another and seek to blame each other for how things have shaken out. As the novel progresses, this uncertainty and even animosity will bloom in unexpected ways.



Judah and Granny go downstairs, and Dovey comes back over to Abigail to place a hand on her forehead. She assures her that she has no fever, and her ankle will be better in the morning. She leaves to heat up some broth for Abigail, charging Beatie to stay and keep her company. Alone in the room with Beatie, Abigail whines that she wants to return to her own “place,” but Beatie insists that she doesn’t know where that is—she has no idea what happened, and never “went there” before she had the fever. One minute, Beatie says, she was in the lane, and the next she was able to see magnificent “towers and castles,” and heard children calling her name.

As Abigail listens to Beatie speak, she realizes that Natalie’s belief that the little furry girl was unhappy was true—Abigail wonders if the reason Beatie’s hair is cropped so short is due to her fever. Before she can ask Beatie about her life, though, Beatie asks if Abigail comes from “Elfland.” Abigail insists there is no Elfland, but Beatie says she believes Elfland is where Granny’s own great-great-grandmother picked up the “Gift.” Abigail replies that Beatie and her family are all crazy.

Beatie asks Abigail how the playing children all knew her name, but Abigail insists she doesn’t know. Beatie shouts that she will find a way to make Abigail tell her, and will find a way to hear more about the “castles and palaces” and the “queer” things she saw in Abigail’s world. Abigail cruelly taunts Beatie, telling her that perhaps she has the Gift after all. Beatie goes pale. Abigail tells Beatie that if Beatie doesn’t take her back to where the two of them first met, she will tell Beatie’s Granny where she comes from, and who brought her here. Abigail then turns away from Beatie, wondering dully what the Gift even is before drifting off to sleep.

CHAPTER 4

Abigail is awoken twice during the night by the sounds of a child “whimpering forlornly” above her own ceiling—she realizes that there must be a child living in the attic above her, and as she hears uneven footsteps on the stairs, she realizes the limping Dovey must be looking after it. Soon, Abigail hears Dovey limping into her own room, and pretends to be asleep. She wants to like Dovey, but does not fully trust her. Granny enters the room as well—both women are in **dressing-gowns**.

Though Abigail has believed that Beatie is in possession of the knowledge of how all this came to pass, Beatie reveals herself to be as clueless as Abigail herself as to what exactly has transpired, and how. Beatie was also as confused as Abigail is now when she first found herself in the present—the only difference is that Beatie was able to find her way back to her own time.



Beatie’s belief in the realm of the strange and the magical seems ridiculous to Abigail, who wants to quickly stamp out Beatie’s belief that she comes from some mystical, foreign land. Abigail thinks that Beatie and her family are crazy, but surely poor Beatie thinks the very same of Abigail at this point.



The central tension within Beatie’s character is her desire both to know more about the world she glimpsed briefly when she heard the children chanting her name and followed their voices, and her competing fear of engaging too much with the second sight that allowed her to get to the future in the first place. Abigail declares her intent to take advantage of that key weakness within Beatie, though she does not yet know the gravity of what she is dealing with.



Abigail is still confused and disoriented, unfamiliar with the house she is in and its inhabitants. Strangest of all is the intense fascination Dovey and Granny seem to have with Abigail. Abigail is literally sleeping with one eye open as she attempts to understand her new surroundings.



The two women converse in quiet tones—Dovey tells Granny that Judah, a seaman, left to join the crew of the next ship out, as the evening fog seems to be lifting. Dovey also tells Granny that she gave Gibbie—the child upstairs—a draught to put him to sleep, but is worried about him, as he looks pale and in poor health. Dovey asks Granny whether she has a good or bad feeling about Gibbie’s health, but Granny confesses that she has no clear feelings anymore—she is all mixed up. Dovey asks Granny if she has begun to doubt whether “this little one here”—meaning Abigail—is in truth “the Stranger.”

Granny tells Dovey that she is certain about Abigail—she is the Stranger who will save the Gift for the family. Dovey agrees—she knew by Abigail’s gown that Abigail was the one, and adds that she “almost fainted” when she saw that Abigail’s **dress** was exactly the same as a pattern the two of them had worked out but not yet sewn.

Abigail is pulled under into sleep, and is afraid that the two women have poisoned or drugged her. When she wakes up in the morning, she is still feeling resentful and skeptical of her hosts, and startled by the unfamiliar noises of the house she’s found herself in. She hears whining from upstairs, which she takes to be Gibbie’s; screams from another room, which she knows are Beatie’s; and lastly she hears Granny’s calming voice, making peace in the house.

Abigail sits up. Her head feels better, but her ankle still pains her. She looks at it beneath the blankets and sees that it is bruised and hugely swollen. Fresh from sleep, she takes stock of her situation, and realizes that she is indeed, somehow or other, in the last century. She recalls Granny and Dovey’s words from the night before, and wonders what they were talking about when they mentioned her being the Stranger who would help preserve the family’s Gift.

Dovey comes into the room with fresh warm water for Abigail to wash up with. Dovey asks Abigail if she is able to remember anything about who she is or how she got to them. Abigail says that all she remembers is her name, and that she is fourteen. Dovey is surprised—she tells Abigail she’d assumed she was Beatie’s age, as she hasn’t filled out at all. Dovey tells Abigail to get dressed. When Abigail asks for her own clothes, Dovey, looking uncomfortable, tells Abigail that her **shift** had been so stained with blood and dirt that Granny burnt it. Abigail begins to wail, but reminds herself that she needs to keep a clear and even head.

As Dovey and Granny converse openly about Abigail, Abigail begins to hear terms that make her realize that something even stranger than she can imagine is going on right under her nose. Clearly, Abigail means something to these people, though she cannot discern exactly what.



The conversation Abigail overhears reveals that something wonky is going on with time—apparently Abigail is in possession of a dress that Granny and Dovey will sew together one day.



Abigail wakes in a state of continued disorientation and even anger, but as she lies still and absorbs her surroundings, she begins to make sense of the noises she hears around her, and understand just a little bit more who these people are and what their relationships to one another are like.



A new day brings a little bit of healing, and Abigail is able to take stock of her situation without the veil of pain and deep confusion previously hung over her. She still doesn’t understand much of what is going on, but she knows one thing for certain—she is not in her own time.



Clothes in this novel often symbolize a connection between two different time periods. When Abigail is denied her own dress, there is the sense that the connection between her own time and wherever she is now has been disrupted. Getting back is going to be more difficult than she’d assumed.



Granny comes into the room to check on Abigail, and when Abigail asks if she can get up and walk about the house, Granny insists that Abigail needs to stay in bed. Abigail says she's bored, and asks if there's anything she can read. Dovey and Granny are pleasantly surprised that Abigail can read, and lament that Beatie and Gibbie have not been able to have a good education in the colonies. As women of the Tallisker family, Granny says, a low education is not good enough for them, though it may be good enough for the Bow family. Dovey chides Granny for looking down on the Bows, reminding her that Uncle Samuel had to go off and fight for his country—he had more important things to worry about than education.

Granny tells Abigail that all there is to read is the family Bible, but Abigail shakes her head. Granny anxiously asks Abigail if she is “godless,” and Abigail claims that she doesn't remember. Granny implores Dovey to tell Beatie to read to Abigail from the Bible later that day.

Abigail lies in bed and listens to the sounds of the nineteenth-century Rocks district outside her window. She has to use a chamber pot to relieve herself, which embarrasses her, but she also gets to spend some time with Dovey and learn more about her. Dovey's real name is Dorcas Tallisker, and she limps because when she was young, she and Judah got into a trundle-cart accident in which Dovey broke her thigh-bone. Dovey tells Abigail all about the beautiful but harsh Orkney isles, north of Scotland, where the Bows and the Talliskers come from.

Dovey is brushing Abigail's hair when the two of them hear footsteps coming up the stairs. Dovey tells Abigail that Uncle Samuel Bow is coming up to apologize to her, and urges Abigail to try to forgive him, as he is a “pitiful man.” Uncle Samuel, when he comes through the door, is stooped and spindly, and his eyes are crossed badly—Dovey whispers to Abigail that it is an effect of a head wound he suffered when he was a soldier, and it is also responsible for his “spells.”

Uncle Samuel enters the room and apologizes to Abigail, insisting that sometimes he believes he is off fighting the Russians again, and goes into a different world. Abigail assures Mr. Bow that she is fine, and tells him that she forgives him. Mr. Bow tells Abigail that he hasn't been himself since his wife Amelia died, and he begins talking about Abigail being the Stranger, but Beatie, who has been listening at the door, appears and shushes him. Dovey asks Beatie what she did in school that day, and Beatie replies glumly that she only got to work on curtsying and sewing.

Abigail listens to the conversations going on around her, and as she engages with the Bows, she realizes that she holds a power few of the people around her do—an education. This gives her a sense of being in possession of wisdom, but she will soon realize that wisdom and power are all relative in this strange new world.



Abigail realizes that religion is especially important in this time and place, and that while she may have a more well-rounded contemporary education, a religious background is what is more highly valued here.



Abigail's morning is a bit uncomfortable and certainly unconventional, but as she absorbs more and more of her surroundings, she reacts with a surprising amount of grace and acceptance toward the strange new world she's found herself in. She cannot remain in a state of shock forever—she is actually living with these people now.



Abigail realizes that the man who waylaid her in the street is indeed part of the Bow family, and is perhaps not responsible for his actions, or thus for Abigail's accident. The Bow family clearly has a great deal of love and sympathy for this man despite his outbursts and seemingly violent potential.



With each exchange she has with the Bows, Abigail learns more about the world she is living in. It's clear that Mr. Bow fought in a recent war and has wounds—physical and psychological—from which he has not recovered (this seems like a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, but present decades before it was recognized as a real mental health issue). It is also evident that education is vastly different here from what it is in Abigail's time, as evidenced by Beatie's dissatisfaction with her school curriculum.



Dovey tells Beatie that Granny wants her to read the Bible to Abigail, and suggests she read her a nice passage before leaving the room with Uncle Samuel. Beatie tells Abigail she'd rather read her the gory, violent parts of the Bible that tell of great battles, but Abigail tells Beatie to save her breath—she wants to talk to her about something else. Abigail asks Beatie if she wants to learn more than just sewing and manners, and Beatie admits that she does, but laments that as a girl she is not permitted to become a scholar. Abigail realizes that Beatie wanted to watch the children playing the game bearing her name because she wanted to know how they learned about her. Abigail tells Beatie that though she doesn't know the reason the game is named for her, she can guess, and offers to trade Beatie her guess for Beatie's help in getting back to the place where she time-traveled.

Beatie tells Abigail she does not want to go against Granny, since Granny thinks Abigail is the Stranger, and wants to keep her around. Abigail tells Beatie to go away, and turns her back to the girl. Beatie relents, and tells Abigail she will help her, but that if Granny finds out, there will be trouble. Abigail tells Beatie that she believes that the children were using Beatie's name in their game because Beatie, somehow, is going to be famous. She makes Beatie promise to keep the secret of what she is about to tell her, and then confides that it is not Elfland she comes from, but the future.

Beatie asks if people still die of fever and smallpox in the future, and when Abigail tells her they do not, Beatie cries, lamenting that her mother and the baby she lost would still be alive, and that Gibbie wouldn't be so sick. Abigail lets Beatie cry, feeling very sorry for her. When Beatie calms down, she asks Abigail to promise once more that she wasn't lying about where she came from. Abigail promises, and Beatie agrees to uphold her end of the bargain.

Over the course of the next two days, Abigail learns a lot about the Bows and the Talliskers from Beatie herself. Dovey Tallisker is a cousin of the Bows, and she was raised by her father and his mother, who is Granny Tallisker. After Dovey's father's death, Granny and Dovey came to New South Wales to live with Granny's daughter, Amelia—Samuel's late wife—but when the two of them arrived, they found everyone deathly ill with typhoid fever.

Beatie's fiery, strange personality is reflected in her desire to focus on the more gory and outlandish parts of the Bible—clearly a transgressive idea in her time and place. Abigail, however, does not want to waste any time on things she has no interest in. She has a clear goal in mind—to get back to her own time—and here she attempts to leverage power over Beatie in service of that goal. She knows that to Beatie, knowledge and wisdom equal power, and she offers Beatie the chance to pursue both knowledge of her future and traditional education in exchange for return passage to her own world.



Beatie has a strong and deep sense of duty to her family, and is reluctant to go against Granny, who she knows has powers both mystical and concrete within the family. Abigail nonetheless knows how to get Beatie's goat, and bribes the girl with exactly what she wants: enticing bits of information about the future she is so scared of actually seeing.



Abigail did not realize that hearing about the future would impact Beatie so profoundly, but again forgot how strong Beatie's sense of familial duty and love is. Abigail feels sorry that she has brought Beatie such sadness, and guilt that she did so in the name of furthering her own agenda.



As Abigail learns more about the Bows and the Talliskers, she realizes how long and arduous their family's journey has been. They have had to contend with miserable factors that Abigail has never even had to consider, and as she realizes the depths of their pain, she finds herself feeling more deeply for them.



Abigail asks Beatie to tell her next about the mysterious Gift, but Beatie says it's a family secret. Abigail insists that as she is the Stranger, and therefore connected to the secret of the Gift, she has a right to know about it—if Beatie won't tell her what it is, she says, she'll ask Granny. Beatie pleads with Abigail not to go to Granny, saying that all she wants is to be a scholar—she doesn't want to “see things and know things a mortal body [shouldn't] know.” Abigail realizes that the Gift must be some kind of second sight, and that Beatie is terrified of having it.

On the third day, Abigail is allowed to get dressed and have Mr. Bow carry her downstairs. The **clothing** Abigail must wear is complicated and uncomfortable, but knowing she must pretend to fit in, she puts it on anyway. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, Abigail sees that between her ugly clothes, her dirty hair, and her head wound, she looks awful, but Dovey insists that “beauty does not matter.”

As Mr. Bow carries Abigail downstairs, she thinks he looks strange, and wonders if another “spell” is coming on. Abigail sits in the small front room of the house in a rocking chair near the fireplace. On the other side is a small boy, who introduces himself as Gilbert Samuel Bow. He tells Abigail that he is “in decline,” and that if he lives to his next birthday, he will be ten years old. “Why bother,” Abigail thinks, but does not say anything aloud.

CHAPTER 5

As Gibbie and Abigail sit by the fire, Gibbie tells Abigail that he is not long for the world—his doctors have all given up on him. Dovey brings Gibbie and Abigail two bowls of broth and a box of dominoes to play with, but Gibbie forlornly says he must “turn away from the things of this world.” Abigail chides Gibbie for “lying around like an old granny,” but Dovey reverently explains that Gibbie has been near death. Gibbie proudly states that he still is, and that perhaps by his birthday, he will be able to join his mother in heaven.

Abigail is well aware of the morbidity and fascination with death typical of the Victorian era due to the “kilos” of mourning **outfits**, brooches, and jewelry that have passed through her mother's shop, and finds it all exasperating. So much of this time is foreign to Abigail—she does not understand the macabre fascination with death, or the lax bathing schedule, or the way people dress.

As Abigail sees the practical aspects of what the Bows and Talliskers have had to contend with, she also comes to understand the stranger aspects of their family's peculiar burden. She realizes that there is something mystical going on in the family—something that Beatie is deathly afraid of, and that Granny seems to be the proprietor of.



Abigail consents to wear the ugly clothes that not only make her feel drab, but to some extent sever the hope she felt about getting back to her own world any time soon.



Abigail is already so bored and fearful of life in the 19th century that she does not even see the point in trying to stay alive here—a very dark, macabre sentiment indeed, and a sensibility that she will soon realize she shares with the seemingly sick Gibbie.



As Abigail observes the strange mannerisms and affectations of the sickly Gibbie, she understands that the young boy has an ardent obsession with death and decay. He longs to depart this world, and seems to be trying as hard as he can to hasten the process of ascending to heaven.



Abigail's knowledge of the past, however cursory, allows her to understand that Gibbie's proclivities are in large part a product of his environment. Even though Abigail understands this in theory, seeing it in person is something totally different, and Gibbie's attitude bewilders and repels her.



Gibbie begins speaking aloud about the extravagant plans he has for his own funeral. Abigail warns Gibbie not to fixate on death, because if he actually died, he'd be leaving behind all his family—Gibbie, however, seems thrilled by the prospect of his family mourning his loss. Abigail is shocked that she has encountered a child even more repellent than Vincent Crown.

Abigail is shocked and repulsed to find that despite the significant differences in the two time periods, there are many similarities—mainly, the fact that her pet peeve, a whiny and self-absorbed child, has found a way to follow her a hundred years into the past.



Gibbie does not want to play dominoes, so to pass the time, Abigail opens the window curtains and looks out on the dingy but bustling street. She is distracted, though, by a commotion in the adjacent confectionery shop. Mr. Bow storms into the parlor and pulls a rusty sword down from the mantel, screaming about approaching Russian troops. Mr. Bow runs into the street, and Abigail watches as he goes down the lane. Abigail goes into the shop, where a frightened Dovey tells Granny that she doesn't know how Mr. Bow got his hands on the rum. Abigail realizes that Mr. Bow is timid until he drinks, but as soon as he imbibes liquor, he becomes wild.

As Abigail begins to understand Mr. Bow's situation a little bit better, she is both bemused and sympathetic. Mr. Bow's situation is disturbing, but the fact that Abigail can see a clear pattern to his "spells" gives her some feeling of wisdom, and even control, regarding the situation. At the same time, the recognition of his trigger means that whenever he might drink in the future, something terrible is bound to happen soon after.



Granny tells Dovey she is going to go after Samuel, and asks Dovey to help clean up in the shop, as Mr. Bow has made a mess there. Abigail looks out into the street and realizes that she knows exactly where in the Rocks she is, despite how different everything looks. She has traveled far in time, but not in space, and she's happy to know that she doesn't need Beatie's help getting back after all—though she resolves to wait until her wounds have healed before attempting to get home, lest she worry her mother.

Abigail had felt slightly hopeless up to this point, but as she realizes that she is not in some foreign, inscrutable place—she is in her own backyard, essentially—she is filled with a renewed sense of determination and capability.



Dovey and Granny bring Mr. Bow inside and help him to a bench. The shop is still a mess, and Abigail offers to help get things in order. Mr. Bow sits in the corner as if in a trance while the women work. Gibbie appears in the door and asks why no one is paying attention to him, sick as he is—Dovey feels Gibbie's head and tells him he actually feels all right, but that he should go up to bed if he's ill. Gibbie insists on waiting for someone to carry him. Abigail is incensed that Gibbie is faking illness.

Having seen how difficult and often dire things are for the Bows—and how there is a member of their family who is truly suffering from an illness no one can fix—Abigail's patience for Gibbie's attention-grubbing playacting dwindles to nothing very quickly.



The women salvage what they can of the ruined treats throughout the shop, and Dovey shows Abigail the many different kinds of candy Mr. Bow makes. Gibbie laments that no one will carry him upstairs, and that his own father is too ill to care for him. Mr. Bow breaks down in tears, calling for his dead wife Amelia. Abigail pinches Gibbie on the back of the neck and he runs up the stairs. Granny chides her for doing so, but Abigail offers that at least her method worked.

In a moment of total chaos in the Bow family, Abigail uses her unlikely methods to introduce a bit of innovation into the way they do things. She does not have patience for Gibbie, and shows the Bows that there are other ways of handling issues. She thus shows that she has a kind of wisdom to offer them as well.



Granny helps Abigail back into bed and applies a healing poultice to her ankle. Over the course of the next few days, the bruise fades. Abigail, realizing that the opportune moment for her escape is drawing near, begins observing the Bows and the Talliskers more carefully. She's afraid that there will be many problems with her return to the future—her parents' anxieties about her being missing, returning to the present in such odd **clothes**—but resolves to deal with those problems when she gets to them.

Abigail is amazed by the kindness not just of the family that has taken her in, but of the community in general—she knows that even her own kind mother would never have taken in a strange girl off the streets. Abigail realizes, in the light of this kindness, how unkind she herself has been to her own parents.

Though the Victorian world is dangerous, rife with disease, war, and subpar education and social security, Abigail concedes that it is in many ways “a more human world” than Abigail's own. Against all odds, she finds herself wishing she could stay awhile and observe more, but soon pushes the thought from her head and resolves to focus on planning her journey home.

Abigail is the recipient of kindness, care, and love from the Bows—but still only sees their attention to her as a way to further her own goal of getting home. Abigail is still self-absorbed and wary of connection, able to think only of herself and what she has told herself she wants and needs.



Abigail is learning about kindness, love, and duty—even though all she wants is to get back to her own world, this place has things to teach her, and lessons from which she can learn and grow.



Abigail is having some conflicting feelings. She wants to escape this strange and largely undesirable time she has found herself in—but even so, she concedes that there are things about it which fascinate and even comfort her. She pushes back against these feelings, though, afraid of what they mean, and reluctant to delay her return any longer.



CHAPTER 6

The day Abigail runs away to go home begins like any other. She is dressed in Dovey's plain **clothes**. She has noticed over the last several days that some women, either highborn ladies or “high-steppers”—women unacceptable to polite society—wear finer clothes of lace and silk, while working women always wear drab, modest dresses. Abigail understands now why her mother's shop never gets any lower-class Victorian clothing in—it would have been worn out by hard conditions and labor.

On the day Abigail tries to run away, her ankle has gone down to its normal size, and she is wearing more comfortable shoes. Beatie goes off to school, excited that Judah's ship is supposed to make port again tonight, and he will be home. Abigail helps Granny make sweets in the shop, and as she does, marvels at how quickly not only the Bows and the Talliskers but the rest of the community, too, were to believe the story that Abigail was an immigrant girl who lost her memory. She has been in the past for two weeks now, and in those two weeks there has been little discussion beyond the first few days of Abigail's green **dress**, her being the Stranger, or the family's Gift.

Abigail's attention to the clothes she is wearing on the day she plans to leave seems to symbolize her desire to forge a connection between the past and her distant present. Despite her itch to go back to her own time, Abigail is learning more about Victorian New South Wales every day, and becoming more enmeshed in its history in the process.



Abigail holds in her head the fantasy of returning to her own time, but still against all odds finds herself pulled to the kindness she has encountered in this time period. The hospitality of the Bows, and really the whole community in which they live, has surprised Abigail—but still, she is unable to imagine living there any longer, and decides to go through with her plan to return to her own world.



Abigail has had to field endless questions from Beatie about the future, however, but Beatie does not always believe the things Abigail tells her. The one thing Beatie is happy to hear is that women can, in the future, become doctors, teachers, and scholars. Every conversation with Beatie comes back to the question of how the children of the future know her name.

Despite her fear of the Gift, Beatie is shown through her interactions with Abigail to have a burning desire to know things about the future, specifically about her own role in it. But even Abigail cannot answer all of Beatie's questions.



After Beatie has gone off to school and Granny and Dovey leave Abigail alone in the shop with the absent-minded Mr. Bow, Abigail seizes her chance and leaves the shop. She heads down Argyle Street, planning to navigate back to the spot where she first entered the past, believing that as soon as she is there she will be instantly restored to her own time.

Abigail sneakily abandons the shop, taking advantage of poor Mr. Bow's consistent state of mental fog. She sees nothing that can go wrong with her plan—a surefire sign that something very terrible is about to.



As Abigail passes the school where Beatie attends classes, she stoops low, hoping the child will not see her, but nonetheless hears Beatie call her name as she goes by. Abigail breaks into a run, and as she looks back realizes that Beatie did not call her from inside the school, but rather was heading her way with Judah, coming up from the wharf. As Beatie and Judah pursue her, Abigail continues running; she dives into an alley to escape them, and watches as they run right past her. In that moment, a hand fastens around Abigail's ankle.

Abigail runs into Beatie and Judah, neither of whom she was expecting to see. Being caught by them could derail her whole operation, so rather than letting them catch up with her, Abigail runs headlong into something far worse than being brought back to the Bow-Tallisker household.



Abigail looks down and sees a frightful, legless man with a bulging forehead grinning toothlessly up at her—she kicks at the man's face, but he dodges her blows, and bites her on the leg. Abigail screams out Beatie and Judah's names, but then a horrible-smelling sack descends over her head and she cannot see anything more as she is half-carried, half-dragged away. She punches and claws at her captors but is no match for them, and though she succeeds in pulling out some hairs from one of their beards, she cannot stop them from bringing her to a strange, anonymous place.

Abigail has, up until now, been aware of the roughness of the world just outside the shop window, but has largely been shielded from any danger or discord by the love, care, and empathy of the Bows. Having decided that that wasn't enough for her, Abigail has removed herself from that little bubble, and suddenly gotten in very far over her head.



The sack is pulled off Abigail's head—she is in a dark room that smells horrible, and in front of her is a huge woman holding a bloody hand to her hairy chin. Abigail hears a man's husky voice telling the bearded woman—Hannah—that Abigail will fetch a “sweet sum.” Abigail realizes she is in greater danger than she had ever even realized was possible, surrounded by many strangers, and that there is no chance of her fighting her way out.

Abigail realizes that she has been forcefully brought to a brothel, or “whorehouse”—a greater danger than she could ever have imagined. She has been rendered completely powerless; whereas at the Bows' she was just stuck, here she is a true captive.



The people around her openly discuss buying, selling, sampling, and “nibbling” Abigail. The man with the husky voice, Barker, asks Abigail if she’ll be quiet if he takes his hand off of her mouth—Abigail says she will, but as soon as he removes it, she begins screaming Judah’s name. The man stuffs a dirty rag in Abigail’s mouth and pushes her to the ground. He instructs Hannah to keep Abigail close and keep her from becoming “damaged goods.”

Abigail feels something moving beneath her on the ground, and realizes that she has fallen on top of another woman, who resembles a “hobgoblin,” and is in a horrible state of disarray. The woman goes over to a table and begins eating some moldy bread, but one of the other women advises her not to eat it, calling her Doll. Abigail, paralyzed by terror, imagines herself in twenty years’ time as Doll herself, worn out and degraded beyond belief.

A pretty woman approaches Abigail and introduces herself as Emily, but tells Abigail that she goes by Maude, as the name sounds more “posh.” Maude then tells Doll that the lamps have been lit—it’s time to get on the streets. Doll begins to cough horribly, and Maude changes her mind, saying that she won’t bring Doll into the street with her as long as she has her embarrassing cough. One of the other women in the room urges Hannah to throw Doll out, but Hannah says she must be charitable to her own niece. She instructs a man named Chow to take Doll and Abigail up to the attic. Doll begs Hannah to give her some gin before she’s taken away, and Hannah obliges her. Hannah and Chow shut Doll and Abigail in the attic and lock the door.

Abigail looks around the room and immediately tries to think of ways she might get herself out, but she is too frightened to devise a plan. She realizes that the only hope she has is that Judah and Beatie heard her cries for help back on the street. Abigail starts to try to get her hands unbound from the kerchief that holds them—after half an hour, she succeeds. As she works, Doll tells Abigail her sad story.

Doll was born Dorothea Victoria Brand in an ill-educated but still respectable family. Doll attended school and was a “bookish” child, and though her father wished he could afford a better education for his daughter, he could not. After Doll’s father died suddenly, her mother went to a “slop-shop” to work, where she sewed **clothing** standing upright in a cramped room with twenty other women, and soon herself succumbed to illness and death. Doll was sent to live with her aunt Hannah in the colonies, and she tells Abigail that Hannah did her the favor of putting her to work so that she wouldn’t starve.

Abigail is no longer seen as a valuable human life, as she was by the Bows, but rather as a commodity to be bought and sold. Abigail didn’t realize how good she had it back at the confectionery, and now sees the grave mistake she has made in trying to run away.



Abigail sees the worst possible version of her future (and the brutality of the world she has entered) laid out before her in the pitiful, grotesque spectacle of the poor Doll. It seems very possible that Abigail could end up exactly like this miserable woman, and she laments the foolishness that has brought her to this low point.



Doll is seen as a burden by even the other prostitutes, who do not want to be seen with her or socialize with her. Abigail sees her worst fears reflected in Doll’s plight, which seems to worsen by the minute. When Abigail realizes that Doll is only still in the whorehouse—let alone alive—due to the “duty” her apparent relative Hannah feels toward her, she is horrified by the reversal of the idea of familial love and duty she sees laid out before her.



Abigail is so paralyzed by fear that she is unable to find a way to come to her own rescue. She realizes that she is completely in the hands of the Bows—the people whose care she has betrayed by running away from them for this miserable situation.



Doll’s story demonstrates to Abigail the dire straits of the Victorian era working class. Abigail sees their pain and suffering all around her, from which she has been shielded by the Bows. She realizes the depths of misery that many people face, and understands at last how lucky she was to have been found and taken in by the Bows when she arrived in the past, seeing now the grisly end she could very well meet.



Doll is in a stupor or a trance as she tells her story, and Abigail takes the opportunity to get to her feet and go to the window, slowly working an iron bar that blocks the pane from its sockets. Abigail is terrified, and almost all she can think to do is silently beg Granny, who has the Gift, to help her. Abigail finally gets the window open, and sees a frayed rope hanging from above. She tries to pull on the rope, but it is so old that it turns to dust in her hands. Abigail's eyes fill with tears—her last hope has gone. Just then, she looks up, and sees that someone is lying on the roof above her, looking down at her.

Abigail's last resort is to hope against hope that the Gift is, after all, real. She works to save herself once her faith in the Gift falters, but her efforts fail. Just as all hope has been lost, though, someone comes to Abigail's rescue—someone who still, against all odds, feels a sense of duty towards the runaway Stranger.



CHAPTER 7

Abigail, frightened, is about to duck out of the window and shut it when she hears a familiar voice call to her—it's Judah. He tells her that he's brought some of his shipmates with him, and that they're going to throw down a line with a loop it in at pull her up. The men do so, and in moments Abigail is on the roof, limp and sweaty and frightened but safe at last. Abigail asks Judah how he knew where she was—he tells her that it was Granny who told him.

Abigail is saved—seemingly by Judah but, in truth, it is revealed, by Granny. In her deepest moment of need, Granny has helped Abigail and fulfilled a duty to her—even though Abigail was trying to escape, and landed herself in a horrible situation partly of her own making.



Abigail, Judah, and his shipmates scurry across the roofs of nearby buildings, and the boys are impressed by Abigail's swiftness and bravery. After they slide down off a sturdy roof into the street below, Abigail throws up. Though she is ashamed, Judah comforts her, telling her it's a wonder she is even conscious considering all she's been through. Judah gathers Abigail up in his arms, and the next thing Abigail knows, she is being carried through the door of the confectionery.

Abigail shows herself to be strong and capable as the others help her escape, but the moment she is brought back to safety, she finds herself crumpling, whatever power she had sapped from her by fear, anxiety, and the enormous relief of escaping a horrible fate.



Judah takes Abigail upstairs and lays her down on her own bed. He asks Dovey how Granny is doing, and Dovey replies that she is “low.” Abigail tries to ask what is happening with Granny, but finds that she cannot speak. Dovey tells Abigail that she is in shock, and that her voice will return to her by the morning. Dovey asks Abigail if any of the “villains” who kidnapped her did anything bad to her—Abigail longs to tell the whole story, but instead simply shakes her head no. Judah tucks Abigail in and then goes to see Granny. Abigail is dazzled by the warmth and beauty of Judah's smile, and longs to thank him for saving her, but can do nothing except squeeze his hand.

Abigail is in such a state of shock, and so weakened by what has happened to her, that she is unable to connect or communicate with the Bows. The Bows' love for her is what ultimately saved her—despite the fact that in escaping she was, on some level, attempting to betray them and the hospitality and kindness they had shown her.



Dovey gets Abigail ready for bed and leaves her alone, but Beatie enters the room and sits at the edge of Abigail's bed. She angrily asks Abigail what came over her, and why she would have fled to the worst part of the neighborhood—especially when Beatie had given Abigail her “solemn word” that she would help her return to her own time. Abigail can make only a faint cry of protest before she is overtaken by sleep.

Beatie berates Abigail for having gone off on her own and gotten into trouble, but Abigail is too weak to fight the fiery little girl. Beatie has a point—she had committed herself to a duty to Abigail, and Abigail did not trust her, or the rest of the Bows, to follow through.



In the morning, Abigail awakes to find Dovey kneeling at her bedside, praying that Abigail is still as “innocent as she was when she came to [the family’s] care.” Abigail asks Dovey how Granny is doing, and Dovey says Granny is not well at all. Abigail begins to cry, and laments aloud that she doesn’t understand anything about the Bows, the Talliskers, and the mysterious Gift. Dovey insists that Granny should be the one to explain everything to Abigail, but that she is in no state to do so, as she was “like a dead woman for two hours” while Abigail was missing.

Abigail begs Dovey to confirm that she is the Stranger. When Dovey does, Abigail implores Dovey to see how isolated and frightened she is, not understanding anything about her role in the Bow and Tallisker families’ lives. Beatie creeps into the room and sits at the edge of Dovey’s bed, and Dovey, as she begins to explain the Gift, urges Beatie to keep quiet.

Dovey explains that the Gift is not hereditary in the Bow family, but rather in the Tallisker clan. She explains, too, that Orkney is a “queer old place” where dwarves, fairies, and spirits often waylay travelers and shepherds and cast spells upon them. Granny’s seventh grandmother was taken by elves as a girl and returned with the ability to see the future—the precious Gift that grants its bearer foresight, healing powers, and secret wisdom. The Gift can be handed down by men in the family, but never possessed by them—it is only women who wield it. Despite the fact that she has been less in touch with the Gift in her old age, Granny has long been the bearer of a Prophecy, which tells of a Stranger who will come with something belonging to the Talliskers, and who will make the Gift strong again.

Beatie pipes up, cursing the Gift; though she does not want it, she knows it is real. Beatie reminds Dovey of a time when she was sick, and had a dream of a yellow fever rag on the door—Abigail startles to remember she, too, had that very same dream. Beatie confesses that she had another dream—a dream of her own hands, without a ring on any finger, holding a heavy leather book.

A wail comes from upstairs—it’s Gibbie, calling for the chamber-pot. Beatie offers to take it to Gibbie so that Abigail can go and see Granny. Dovey takes Abigail up to Granny’s room. The old woman in the bed is “scarcely recognizable,” and looks ancient and fatigued. Abigail goes to Granny’s bedside and apologizes for worrying and weakening her. Granny extends a hand to Abigail, and Abigail takes it.

Dovey has been worried about Abigail, and Abigail has been worried about Granny. This display of fear and emotion demonstrates the connections that have formed between Abigail and the Tallisker-Bow clan despite her attempts to escape them. Her feelings of concern, worry, and indeed love cannot be denied, and nor can those same feelings the Bows have for her.



Abigail is completely in the dark, and has been since her arrival in 1873. She has been disoriented, confused, and uncertain for a long time now, and she begs Dovey to see the negative effects this has had on her.



Dovey’s explanation of what is really going on in the Bow-Tallisker clan illuminates a lot for Abigail, but still ultimately leaves her with more questions than answers. Abigail realizes that she has a duty to the Bows—she is, she assumes, the Stranger—but does not yet know what that duty entails, how she will complete it, and, most importantly of all, whether she will ever be able to get back to her own time.



Abigail is shown here to have an even deeper connection to the Bows—and to the mysterious Gift—than she thought. It is unclear how Abigail was able to share a dream with Beatie, but this seems to speak to the connection that already exists between the two girls.



Abigail realizes that the damage she has done to Granny is both unnecessary and completely her responsibility, and this puts her in a position of indebtedness toward Granny—but the way Abigail will pay this debt is something she cannot even imagine.



Granny tells Abigail—and Dovey—that now is the time for truth. She asks Abigail if she indeed comes from another time, and Abigail nods, revealing the year of her birth. Granny asks if Abigail ever heard the names Tallisker or Bow in the future, and Abigail says she has not. Granny asks if anyone in Abigail's family bears either name, and when Abigail again answers no, Granny marvels that despite her lack of connection to either family, she is indeed the Stranger. Abigail insists she's not, and there's been a mistake, but Granny knows the truth.

Dovey whispers to Granny what Beatie saw in her dream, and Granny exclaims that it is the first part of the Prophecy proven. Granny explains that the Prophecy applies to every fifth generation, when the Gift is at risk. The Prophecy foretells that one member of the family is to be barren, and one is to die. Granny explains that as Dovey is the sole Tallisker child, and as only three Bow children remain, there are very few who can hand on the Gift to the future generations. Granny says that because of Beatie's vision of her unringed hands, Beatie will be the barren one, and one of the rest of the children is to die—and die young. Dovey assumes it will be Gibbie.

Abigail expresses her distaste for Granny's talking about her family as if they are only pawns in some superstitious game. Abigail proclaims that she wants nothing to do with the Prophecy or the Gift, and longs to return to her own life. She insists she's not the Stranger, and that the Talliskers and Bows must let her return home. Granny, however, tells Abigail that she cannot let her. Abigail tells her that she will run away again and again until she succeeds. Dovey, distressed, begs Abigail to stay until she has done whatever she needs to do, as the Stranger, to protect the Gift—Abigail is their only hope. She realizes that she is trapped.

Abigail attempts once again to convince the Tallisker women that she is not the Stranger—she was not in possession of anything belonging to the family when she was flung into the past—but then she remembers the conversation she heard Dovey and Granny having the first night she arrived, about the pattern they'd designed but not yet sewn. Abigail realizes they were talking all along about the bit of crochet on her **dress**. Dovey tells her that the Parnassus plant is common in Orkney, and the initials, A.T., stand for Alice Tallisker—Granny's name. Abigail laments that the women have burnt the dress, and that now she will never be able to go home.

The fact that Abigail is the fated Stranger, despite her lack of any apparent connection to the Talliskers or the Bows, seems unlikely, but Granny is so sure—and Abigail now so sure of the power of Granny's Gift—that Abigail must accept it as truth.



The mythology of the Gift is shown in this passage to be more complicated than it seemed to be at first glance. There are strange, untamable forces at work here—forces that mirror the unpredictable mechanism of time itself.



Though Granny's main directive is the preservation and strengthening of her family's precious legacy, Abigail interprets her maneuvering as sly machinations that disregard the individuals within her family in service of a larger whole. But Granny is of a different time, and duty to family—not to any one person, herself included—is of paramount importance to her. Nothing Abigail says can change Granny's mind.



Abigail realizes with fascination and horror that she brought this duty upon herself, however unwittingly, by sewing the Tallisker lace to the collar of her green dress. Abigail has conscripted herself into the duty of the Bow-Tallisker clan, and now fears that she will be stuck in a hell of her own making forever.



Abigail, angry, leaves the room and goes downstairs. Dovey follows her down, and attempts to embrace her, but Abigail tells Dovey that she is cruel—having known the pain of losing her own parents, Dovey is still conspiring with Granny to keep Abigail from hers. Dovey confesses that she lied to Abigail—the **dress** was not burnt, but was simply hidden away, and is very safe.

Abigail returns to Granny's room and demands that Granny verify Dovey's claim. Granny tells Abigail that when Abigail has completed whatever it is she needs to do in their time, she will return the **dress** to her, and allow her to go home. Abigail complains that she doesn't know what she has to do. Granny reassures her that it will show itself in time, and that the Gift is more precious than any one of them—they all must devote themselves to its preservation.

Abigail asks Granny why, if she herself has the Gift, she cannot see what is to come—Granny replies that she is old, and not as in touch with it as she once was. Abigail wonders privately to herself, then, how Granny knew she was tied up in the warehouse, and Granny replies aloud that she was able to see Abigail when Abigail called her. It was sending out her mind to search for Abigail, Granny says, that so weakened her.

Gibbie calls out for help again, and this time Abigail volunteers to go see to him. As she mounts the stairs to the attic, she is chilled by the fact that Granny answered a question she had not voiced aloud. Abigail goes over to the window, and Gibbie warns her not to open it lest he freeze to death. Abigail looks out on the yard behind the house, and sees two Chinese men doing laundry. She returns to sit at the edge of Gibbie's bed, and asks if there is anything he wants to do to amuse himself. He reveals that sometimes Granny and Judah tell him stories, but just as his tone betrays his excitement, he catches himself and plaintively states that soon he will go up to Heaven and will have no need of stories.

Abigail asks Gibbie if he has ever heard the story of [Treasure Island](#), and volunteers to tell it to him. As she begins, Abigail realizes that if Gibbie does not die, only Dovey and Judah are left to fulfill the second half of the prophecy, and momentarily pauses, letting the weight of her realization sink in. After a moment, Gibbie begs her to go on, and she does, but cannot stop herself from quietly fearing that it will be Judah who dies.

Dovey wants two things—she wants to help Granny preserve the gift, and she wants Abigail to like her, and to be part of the family. Dovey thus acts ambivalently at some points in service of obtaining these two competing goals.



Granny needs something from Abigail, and is holding hostage Abigail's one connection to her own time until the deed is done. This seems duplicitous, but Granny holds her duty to her family above all else, and in this way is acting nobly in spite of everything.



Though Granny claims to be disconnected from the Gift, she is still clearly able to engage in some kinds of clairvoyance and foresight—she reads Abigail's mind for a second time that night, despite the fact that doing so clearly has a malignant effect.



Abigail is beginning to understand the true power of the Gift and the weight of the enormous legacy Granny is unfairly burdened with passing down all on her own. Abigail's visit to Gibbie, despite her dislike of him, symbolizes that she is beginning to understand and accept the duty she now bears to the Bow family, at least to a small degree.



Abigail is beginning to wonder whether the Prophecy could really be true—and, if it is, how it will affect the family who has taken her in and shown her such graciousness. Here Abigail also starts to recognize her growing feelings for Judah, which are contrasted with her total apathy towards Gibbie's fate.



CHAPTER 8

Abigail feels slightly like she did when her father first left her and her mother. She feels afraid, angry, and helpless, but tells herself that she will not let herself be “beat”—she plans to search high and low for her **dress**, or bribe or coax either Beatie or Judah into telling her where it is hidden. Though she is full of despair, Abigail considers how much she has learned about herself in “this rough new world,” and about real life as well.

Abigail decides to not grow silent and distraught, and asks Granny how she can help around the house and the shop. Granny embraces Abigail and confesses that though her heart aches for Abigail, she knows her service to the Bows and Talliskers will be worth it. Granny confesses that it is her own duty to preserve the Gift, and she can do nothing against that singular mission. Granny adds slyly that if Abigail is planning on searching for her “**gown**,” it’s hidden where Abigail will never look for it.

Abigail inserts herself into the household routine, scrubbing and dusting the house and raking the shop fire. Abigail approaches Beatie about the **dress**, but Beatie tells Abigail that she has no idea where it is—and even if she did, she confesses, she would not tell Abigail. Abigail tries to bribe Beatie by promising to take her along to the future so that she can pursue an education, and though Beatie is tempted, she tells Abigail that she could never leave Dovey.

Abigail often works in the shop, and finds that Mr. Bow, despite his spells, is a timid and mild companion. The two of them discuss Abigail’s being the Stranger—Abigail insists that as an Englishman, Mr. Bow can’t possibly believe the silly Orkney tale of elves and Gifts, but Mr. Bow resignedly assures Abigail that he does believe. Before he married his wife Amelia, she told him that she would die before him, leaving him a widower, and that did come to pass.

Abigail asks Mr. Bow about his time in the Crimean War, but he tells her he does not remember much—his wound and resulting illness marred his memory, and he confesses that without Granny and Dovey he does not want to think about what would become of him. Abigail realizes that Mr. Bow will never cross Granny to help her find her **dress**. Abigail does not give up, though, and searches surreptitiously for the gown whenever she can. Granny catches her once, and tells Abigail that such behavior is not “worthy” of her—before confessing that the dress is in Dovey’s bride chest, which is locked. Abigail tells Granny that she just wants to go home. Granny assures her that it won’t be long before she can.

A recurring motif throughout this section of the novel is the deep tension Abigail feels between her desire to get home and back to her “real life,” and her fascination with the past and increasing allegiance to the Bows. Abigail is caught between a sense of duty and her desire to disconnect herself, and in this chapter she will struggle greatly with her competing instincts and impulses.



This passage shows that Granny, too, has conflicting emotions about the entire situation. Granny’s allegiance is to her family, and to the Gift, but it breaks her heart to hurt Abigail and to keep her bound to a place she does not want to be.



Abigail makes herself more helpful to the Bows while at the same time trying to outmaneuver them. This passage displays her competing desires, and her way of being aloof and self-serving while still doing the minimum to uphold her “duty,” just as she did back in her old life.



Even as Abigail is continually searching for a way out of the past and away from the Bows, she finds herself connecting with each of them—even the strange, disturbed Mr. Bow—more deeply every day.



Abigail disappoints Granny by continuing to look for the dress, and this displays that she has not yet matured enough to commit fully to her duty to the Bow family. Granny decides to put Abigail to the test by telling her exactly where the dress is, and seeing if Abigail will continue attempting to serve her own interests, or will honor and respect Dovey, and thus the Bow-Talliskers more generally, by submitting to her duty on their behalf. Notably, the idea of Dovey’s future wedding also becomes important later.



Abigail has noticed a change in Granny—she has become older and smaller in the weeks since Abigail’s attempt at escape. She sits most often in the parlor with Gibbie now, rather than working in the shop or around the house. Granny knows that it was sending out her mind to search for Abigail that weakened her. Granny tells Abigail that if she could do what she did for Abigail, it’s only fair that Abigail does something for Granny in return. Abigail begrudgingly agrees. Still, Abigail sometimes sits longingly in front of Dovey’s bride chest—she knows that from the age of seven, every Orkney girl begins collecting household linen towards a dowry, and though she would never break into the chest and betray Dovey, she wants her **dress** badly.

Abigail begins noticing how Judah, a seaman who is often away, blusters in and out of the house like the tide; moreover, Abigail realizes that everyone in the family draws strength from Judah and his sunny personality. Though only eighteen, Judah is a man in earnest, unlike eighteen-year-old boys in the future who are so aimless and undisciplined. Abigail often regales Judah with tales of the ships of the future, but Judah is completely uninterested in all Abigail has to share about the future of government, travel, and science—even news of the moon landing does not move Judah. Unable to connect with Judah about the future, Abigail tries to discuss his past with him, but he says plainly that the past is “dead and gone,” and he is only concerned with being alive “at this minute.”

Whenever Judah is home from his travels, the house is always noisy and lively. Judah dreams of having his own ship one day, and shares his hopes with Abigail. During one of these conversations, as the two of them joke back and forth, Abigail says that she’ll miss Judah when she goes home, and all of a sudden it hits her—she is in love with Judah. Abigail quickly bids Judah goodnight and returns to her room.

Dovey is in bed and asleep when Abigail gets to the room—she undresses quickly and gets into her own bed, burying her face in her pillow. She cannot believe she has been “pierced” by love, just like all the other girls she ridiculed back in her own time—just like her foolish, lovesick mother, who often told Abigail the tale of the love at first sight she experienced with Weyland. Though Abigail can “scarcely admit it to herself,” she knows deep down that it is true—she loves Judah, and has loved him all along. Abigail cannot sleep, she is so happy, and when Gibbie stirs upstairs, Abigail whispers to Dovey that she herself will go see to him.

As Abigail realizes that Granny has sacrificed not only time and energy but her own personal health and well-being on Abigail’s behalf, Abigail realizes that she must commit to doing the same for Granny. However, she cannot fully stamp out her desire to serve her own interests and return to her own time. Despite her childish behavior of sitting in front of the bridal chest, Abigail does display a little bit of growth in that she respects the role that has been thrust upon her and does not try to get her dress or escape again.



So many members of the Bow family are obsessed with either the past or the future. Granny is preoccupied with the future, and with preserving the Gift; Gibbie is simultaneously focused on the past and his mother’s death, as well as the future and his own impending demise. Beatie wants to know more about the future, but is fearful of actually being able to see it on her own. Judah, then, is an outlier, as he is only concerned with the present moment. This makes him seem like a very healthy and “normal” character, and in some ways as much of an outsider in the Bow family as Abigail herself.



As Abigail experiences the strange and shocking realization that against all odds, she has fallen victim to love, she leans on her oldest instinct—to immediately remove herself from the point of connection and isolate herself, denying her feelings.



Despite all her best efforts to hide herself away from her feelings, Abigail has at last become the victim of romantic love. The power of her feelings for Judah has begun to transform her already—she feels a deep, profound joy within her, and when Gibbie cries in the night she volunteers to go to him, demonstrating how her love for Judah has affected her sense of duty to all of the Bows, even the one she likes least.



When Abigail arrives in Gibbie's room, he whines that he wants Dovey—he is scared of the lightning and thunder outside. Abigail sits beside Gibbie and realizes how sickly he looks and smells. Though it is a cruel thought, Abigail is relieved that it will be Gibbie who dies, thus saving Dovey and Judah. Abigail remembers her mother telling her how powerful love can be, and realizes that it is true—her love for Judah is so overwhelming that she does not care if Gibbie lives or dies.

Abigail asks Gibbie if he wants to hear more [Treasure Island](#), but Gibbie is asleep in moments. The storm recedes, and Abigail watches it calm down. She wonders if the rain will keep Judah from going back out to sea tomorrow, and wishes he could stay a whole week.

Indeed, the heavy rain means that Judah is home more often. Though Dovey worries that a season of so much rain will bring sickness, Abigail is “filled with richness”—the enchanting calm of love has completely overtaken her. Just looking at and listening to Judah is enough for her—she cannot even imagine the unbearable joy of actually being with him.

Dovey's bad leg acts up in the rain, so she moves upstairs to Granny's room where Granny—who still has a bit of the healing touch—can attend to her. Beatie takes Dovey's bed, and as Beatie sleeps like a log through the night, it is most often Abigail who now attends Gibbie when he cannot sleep at nights. Abigail realizes that Gibbie is faking his illness out of an “insatiable desire for sympathy and attention” borne of the loss of his mother, but knows she cannot possibly begin to explain this to any of the Bows, who have never heard of psychology.

One afternoon, after running home to escape a rain storm, Beatie tells Abigail that she has to talk to her. Abigail has noticed that Beatie has been more difficult recently, experiencing more tantrums and sulking more often. Beatie now accuses Abigail of being “stuck” on Judah. Abigail feels a shock run through her, and knows that her private bliss has been breached. She tries to deflect, but Beatie says that Abigail cannot deny it—Beatie can see it in her face. Abigail asks what would be the matter with that even if it were true. Beatie replies that not only does Judah see Abigail as a child, but he is promised to another. Abigail asks who, and Beatie says that Judah is promised to Dovey, and always has been.

The transformative power of love is shown to have a cruel side, as well, as in this passage Abigail openly longs for the death of anyone other than Judah. She is still being selfish, but now the idea of her own happiness includes Judah's wellbeing as well.



All of Abigail's thoughts now eventually trail back to Judah—this demonstrates, again, how transformative and powerful the feelings of love Abigail has are.



Abigail's life has been completely transformed by her new feelings. Just a few days ago she was practically itching to get away from the Bows, but now she is so happy just to be around Judah that she only thinks of how she can grow closer to the family rather than remove herself from them.



As Abigail's love for Judah fills her with light and calm, she finds herself growing closer to the other members of the Bow family as well, and relating to and empathizing with them on a whole new level.



The one member of the family to whom Abigail is not brought closer by her love for Judah is the fiery Beatie. Beatie is fiercely protective of her family, and when she sees that Abigail poses a threat to her family's order and their happiness, she reveals a terrible truth that wounds Abigail deeply. Dovey's wedding chest, which contains Abigail's dress, is now an even more fraught object for Abigail than it was before.



Abigail is shocked and hurt. Beatie goes on to explain that because it was Judah who caused the accident that crippled Dovey, he promised to marry her, as not every man wants a lame wife. Beatie says that Judah will marry Dovey as soon as his time as a seaman is over. Beatie tells Abigail that she will not allow her to come between Judah and Dovey, and will break her head before she lets Abigail infiltrate their partnership. Beatie adds that Granny would let the two of them split up if it meant saving the Gift, but the Gift does not come first to Beatie—Dovey and Judah do.

Abigail leaps up, seizes Beatie by the shoulders, and shakes her before dropping her on the floor. Abigail accuses the shocked Beatie of being a “stirrer,” and threatens her that if she breathes a word of Abigail’s affections to Dovey, Abigail will be the one to break Beatie’s head. Beatie vindictively tells Abigail that no matter what, Granny, with her Gift, will know. Abigail says she’s going to see Granny right away.

CHAPTER 9

Abigail enters Granny’s room, where Granny is sitting in a chair. Granny puts aside her **knitting** and tells Abigail that she has been expecting her. As Abigail sits at Granny’s feet and puts her head in the old woman’s lap, Granny rightly tells Abigail that something frail and precious “like a china cup” has been chipped or cracked. Abigail says that she doesn’t feel like anything has been spoiled, though she didn’t want Beatie to know her secret. Abigail humbly says that perhaps she’s too young to know anything about love after all, but Granny tells Abigail that she herself was just fifteen when she was wed. Granny tells Abigail to look into her eyes.

Abigail looks into Granny’s eyes and hears Granny’s voice, far away—when she looks down at herself, she is in the body of someone else. Granny’s voice explains that she is showing Abigail herself at eighteen, newly widowed. Abigail-as-Granny is poised on the edge of a cliff, longing to throw herself off but knowing that she can’t—she must live on in spite of the pain, for her children and her parents. Abigail tells Granny that she can’t bear to see any more, and is instantly thrown back into the parlor.

Granny tells Abigail that she must know now, through the vision, that the young can experience true love—and true sorrow. Abigail confesses to Granny that she shook Beatie violently, wishing that it were actually Dovey she was harming. She is afraid, she says, to be nasty to Dovey out of jealousy, though she does not want to be. Granny assures Abigail that she will be all right, and sends her from the room, telling her to ask Beatie to come in.

Beatie has had a fascination with and even a fondness for Abigail, but Abigail’s feelings for Judah now render her repellent to Beatie. Beatie reveals that her duty is not to the Gift, but to the immediate members of her family, and her fierce loyalty to her brother and her cousin far outweigh whatever dim connection she felt to Abigail. It is after this exchange that Beatie becomes more of an antagonistic character to Abigail.



Abigail finds that the power of her love for Judah is so strong that she turns to actual violence when those feelings are threatened or called into question. Yet it’s also important to remember that she is a teenager experiencing her first strong romantic desire, and her emotions are a rollercoaster.



Granny’s connection to the Gift is clearly still viable—she knows exactly what has happened to Abigail without Abigail even having to tell her the details. Granny sees this painful moment as an opportunity to connect with Abigail, and to be kind and tender to the girl of whom she is asking so very much. Duty is shown to be a reciprocal thing to Granny, as she approaches Abigail with love and empathy.



Granny shares a new aspect of the Gift with Abigail—one that is powerful, frightening, and illuminating. Granny wants Abigail to see that she is not alone in the intensity of her feelings, and also wants to reveal how the transformative powers of love took hold of Granny herself when she was a girl not much older than Abigail.



In this passage, Park uses Granny to communicate that the feelings and ideas young people have are just as valid and worthy as those of adults. Granny’s validation of Abigail’s joy and sorrow shows that young people’s emotions are to be embraced rather than discounted or underestimated.



Abigail sits at the kitchen table washing potatoes. When Beatie comes out of the parlor after speaking with Granny, she is sniveling, and tells Abigail that Granny has charged her with being kind to Abigail—but she says any kindness she shows Abigail from now on is false. Beatie laments that Granny also told her to keep Abigail's secret from Dovey. Abigail asks why Beatie is so upset, and whether Granny told her something else. Beatie reveals that Granny told her that by Sunday, Judah would decide whom he really loves—and Beatie is afraid that he will choose Abigail. Abigail knows that on Sunday, Judah has promised to take Beatie and Abigail hunting for cockles (a kind of edible mollusk) at the shore. Beatie asks Abigail to promise that she won't hurt Dovey, but Abigail says she can't promise such a thing.

On Sunday, Dovey prepares a picnic basket for Judah, Beatie, and Abigail, but as they prepare for the outing, Abigail feels only anxiety. As the three head out through the shop door, Abigail bids Mr. Bow goodbye, but he does not respond. Judah confesses that he is worried about his father, as his spells are more frequent.

Beatie runs ahead of Judah and Abigail through the empty streets down to the shore. Judah tells Beatie to slow down, as in the cockling boat, she will have to be still and quiet. Down on the dirty shore, which is strewn with debris from ships and rotten fish and garbage, Judah helps the girls into a little boat. Out on the water, the view is beautiful, and Abigail takes in the sight of the bustling Sydney Harbor, which is even busier than it usually is in her own time.

Abigail asks what the ships in the harbor transport, and as she and Judah find themselves in yet another discussion about the innovations of the future, Judah laments that so much money is spent on electric trains and trailers when “the sea and the wind are free for all.”

Judah pulls the little boat into a craggy cove, and instructs Abigail in how to track the shellfish and dig for them. As Abigail wanders the shore, she feels very strongly that this day is going to be her last in 1873. She knows it has something to do with Judah deciding whom he loves—however the decision comes up, though, Abigail vows that she will not be the one to broach it. Exhausted, Abigail sits on a rock and watches Judah and Beatie hunt. Beatie approaches Abigail after a while and accuses her of gawking at Judah, but Abigail has not been lusting after Judah—she has been considering how difficult his life must be, and how hard he works on behalf of his family.

Granny's kindness and empathy towards Abigail is followed up by a sternness with Beatie. Beatie reacts poorly to this, but her anger at Abigail turns to fear that Dovey will be hurt. She wants for Abigail to promise her that no harm, even just emotional harm, will come to her family, but despite her desire to fulfill her duty to the Bows, Abigail cannot influence Judah's actions—whatever will be will be.



Abigail realizes that today is the moment of truth—the course of her life could change forever, depending on what Judah decides.



Since her arrival in 1873, Abigail has felt that the time period as a whole is inferior compared to her own. Judah, though, shows her how beautiful and vibrant the harbor is—and symbolically demonstrates to her that there is more to this world of the past than meets the eye.



Judah is still completely uninterested in the future of technology, and remains committed to the traditions and trappings of his present moment.



Abigail wants to be happy and enjoy the beautiful afternoon with Judah, but is plagued by a strong sense of foreboding. Abigail has been shown to have a touch of clairvoyance, or at least a sensitivity to the mystical workings of time, and though her feeling that Judah's decision will directly impact her journey seems to come from nowhere, it is strong enough that she believes it.



Judah suggests they all get back into the boat and go to another cove, but Beatie insists she wants to climb the rocks. Judah orders Beatie to get in the boat, but Beatie refuses to go. Abigail sides with Beatie, saying she doesn't mind staying a while longer, but then Beatie turns on her, and tells her that her opinion isn't asked or valued. Judah asks Beatie why she's in such a foul mood. Beatie insists that she wants to play Robinson Crusoe, and kicks Judah in the shin. Judah tells Beatie to stay on the shore while he takes Abigail for a boat ride. Judah places a wet sack over the cockles and tells Beatie to mind them, offering her one last chance to join them on the ride—Beatie replies only that she hopes the boat sinks.

Abigail and Judah shove off from the shore. Out on the water, Judah admires the land he knows as New South Wales—he believes humanity has not yet spoiled it. Abigail looks at Judah lovingly. Judah nudges Abigail playfully with his foot and asks why Abigail seems sad. She tearfully says she's afraid that today is her last day with the Bows. Judah embraces Abigail and begs her not to go. Abigail cries and strokes Judah's cheek. He pulls away from her and teases her for weeping on such a beautiful day, calling her his "little one." Judah leans in and kisses Abigail, and her head whirls with pleasure. After the kiss, though, Judah looks bashful, and says that though it was wrong of him to kiss her, he does not regret it.

Abigail tells Judah that she loves him, but he does not answer her. Abigail quickly tells Judah that she knows about Dovey, and that how she feels about him is not for him to worry about. Judah confesses that he is confused, and doesn't know how he feels. Behind them, there is a sound like a seahawk—they turn toward the shore and see Beatie up on the rocks, throwing stones at the ocean. Judah realizes she has seen the two of them, and hopes aloud that she will not tell Dovey.

Judah rows the boat back into shore, where Beatie meets them in a horrible rage. Judah lifts the tantrum-throwing Beatie into the boat. Beatie threatens to punch Judah "yeller and green" for betraying Dovey, but Judah—either speaking out of truth or simply to calm Beatie—tells her that there is nothing between himself and Abigail at all.

In the boat, Abigail attempts to put a hand on Beatie's shoulder, but Beatie shakes her off, and says that they should have left her in the whorehouse all those weeks ago. Judah leans forward and shakes Beatie, chastising her for speaking so cruelly. Beatie replies only that she is "sick to the belly with disgust" over her brother's betrayal.

Beatie, impetuous and headstrong as always, knows what is going on between Abigail and Judah, and attempts to waylay it in whatever way she can. She is unsuccessful, though, as Judah has little patience for his tempestuous little sister, and does not pay attention to her or heed her veiled warnings that something devastating could happen if he is not careful around Abigail.



Abigail and Judah share a genuine and pure moment of romance and connection. Abigail has at last opened herself up fully to love—she has accepted her feelings and made herself vulnerable. Though the moment does not end in true happiness for either Abigail or Judah, the importance of the kiss is palpable—it has allowed Abigail to experience something new and get in touch with a part of herself she'd never allowed to exist before.



Judah's sense of duty to Dovey, at least in this moment, ultimately outweighs his burgeoning feelings for Abigail. Despite the fact that Judah has chosen Dovey, Beatie has seen what transpired, and believes that Abigail has gone back on her promise to try and suppress her feelings for Judah and keep Dovey from harm.



Judah tells Beatie that he feels nothing for Abigail—whether or not this is true, it is what he chooses to say, and Abigail must live with the horrible, crushing weight of this statement.



Beatie will not hear any reason—she is totally absorbed in her own anger, and lashes out cruelly against both Judah and Abigail. Beatie, having witnessed their apparent betrayal of Dovey, has a power over the two of them that all three acknowledge uneasily.



CHAPTER 10

It is a long, wretched boat ride home. Beatie sits with her hands over her ears the whole time, but Judah assures Abigail that Beatie has always been stubborn this way, and her fits have grown worse since her fever. Judah muses aloud at how trusting and tender Dovey is in contrast to Beatie, and admits that he does not want to give her any more suffering. Beatie uncovers her ears and exclaims that Dovey would never want Judah now that he has been untrue to her, before covering them right back up again.

Abigail assures Judah that Beatie won't say anything to Dovey, as Beatie does not want to hurt her either, but Judah says he knows his sister, and knows that in this kind of mood, she would do anything. Judah pulls the boat back into shore and tells Beatie and Abigail to head for the house while he ties the boat up. Beatie takes off running.

Abigail chases Beatie, calling after her not to tell Dovey, but Beatie only calls Abigail "Judas" and tells her to shut up. As the girls hurry down the road, they encounter a great commotion—Mr. Bow is in the street, holding his sword above his head and screaming unintelligibly. A passing constable, chasing Mr. Bow down, warns Beatie that her father has set the shop on fire, and tells her to go get the brigade.

Abigail runs toward the shop, and Beatie follows her. The inside is full of smoke, and Granny is beating at the flames with a wet sack. Beatie yells for a group of street children hanging near the doorway to go get the fire brigade. Abigail and Beatie help Granny try to smother the flames, and Granny explains that Mr. Bow had been hiding a bottle of rum, which he drank most of this morning before throwing the rest into the fireplace. Abigail realizes there's no chance of putting out the fire. She asks where Dovey is—Granny says Dovey went upstairs to fetch her bridal chest.

Abigail tells Beatie to help Granny outside—Abigail herself will go up and save Dovey. She finds Dovey trying to drag the chest down the stairs, but Abigail says there's no time. Together, the girls bring the chest over to the window and shove it out. Dovey warns Abigail that if the chest burns, her **dress** will go with it, and she will never be able to go home again, but Abigail ignores her, focusing only on getting Dovey out safely. Dovey struggles, frightened and overwhelmed, but Abigail implores her to keep going, "for Judah's sake." Abigail shoves Dovey down the stairs, through the kitchen, and out into the yard. Then Dovey pales, and exclaims that they have forgotten Gibbie.

Beatie is clearly spitting mad over what has transpired between Judah and Abigail. Beatie is devoted to the sweet, frail Dovey, and sees any threat to Dovey as a threat to their entire family. The dark, volatile, irrational side of Beatie's personality emerges in this passage as she excoriates Judah and Abigail for their behavior, despite not knowing the full extent of what transpired between them.



Judah is afraid of the power Beatie now holds. With one word, she could bring his betrothal to Dovey, and perhaps even the trust between the members of their family—not to mention the inheritance of the Gift—crashing down.



Beatie's plans to expose Judah and Abigail are waylaid by another of Mr. Bow's spells. Abigail had thought Mr. Bow seemed off when she left for the shore, and now sees that her suspicions were right. This demonstrates how well Abigail knows the Bows now, after living with them so long, but also sets off the climactic action of the novel.



The chaos and wild spread of the fire symbolically mirror the chaos Beatie had threatened to unleash upon the family. Though Judah and Abigail's secret has not been revealed, a different kind of turmoil has overtaken the family, and threatens their legacy in a very different way than Beatie's reveal would have threatened the longevity of the Gift.



This passage shows how much Abigail has matured over the course of her time with the Bows, and also how much she loves them, and thus is willing to uphold her duty to them—even when it comes to Dovey, who she has lately seen as a rival. Abigail risks incinerating the only point of connection she has with the future in favor of saving Dovey, even though she knows that Judah is going to choose Dovey over her.



Abigail wraps a wet quilt around her head and goes back inside to get Gibbie. Though the banister is now ablaze, Abigail leaps up past the first two stairs and goes to the attic. She enters—the room is free of smoke, but Gibbie is screaming. She tells the boy they'll have to go through the window, and she quickly kicks out the glass. Gibbie is frightened, but Abigail assures him that they'll be able to scramble down with ease. Gibbie refuses to move, but Abigail grabs him up and shoves him out the window and onto the roof. Out there, Abigail can hear the sounds of the fire brigade approaching. She sees that Dovey's bride chest is stuck on the roof, and pushes it down into the yard of the Chinese laundry below.

One of the Chinese men uses a pallet to make a safe landing for Gibbie and Abigail to jump down onto, and though Gibbie once again refuses to go, Abigail pushes him off into the waiting arms of the laundry man. Abigail then jumps down herself, and shepherds Gibbie around the corner to the street.

Out on the street, the fire is under control, but the shop is gone. Abigail feels weak and faint. She spots Granny, Dovey, and Beatie across the street and urges Gibbie to run to them. Abigail then sees Judah running down the lane—he goes straight to Dovey and wraps her in his arms. Abigail watches the two of them embrace, knowing that it is Dovey whom Judah loves, and not her. Abigail says goodbye to Judah, silently, in her heart.

CHAPTER 11

The Tallisker-Bows are taken in by the butcher and his wife. Abigail is fussed over and acclaimed for her bravery in saving everyone from the fire. The constables bring back Mr. Bow, and tell Granny that though they won't write him up this time, his spells and violent episodes need to stop or he will soon end up in the madhouse.

Granny tells Abigail that she has at last done what she was sent to do—she saved Dovey for Judah, and now the Gift has double the chance of survival. Dovey begs Abigail to stay even though her task is done, but Abigail says she must return home. Dovey retrieves the green **dress** from the bride chest, and Abigail finds that it now looks strange and foreign to her. Nevertheless, she puts the dress on, and finds that it fits her more tightly—her figure is at last coming in.

Abigail so loves the Bows—and is so resolute in her commitment to her duty to them—that she risks her own life to go up and save even the annoying, sickly Gibbie. Abigail has been transformed by the power of love, and she saves Dovey's bridal chest—and, by proxy, her connection back home—as only a second thought after first ensuring that the Bows, and the Gift, are preserved and safe.



Abigail saves Gibbie before she saves herself, demonstrating again her commitment to saving even the least-liked member of the Bow-Tallisker clan.



As Abigail realizes that Judah does indeed love Dovey truly and deeply, she feels a sadness overtake her. The image of her watching the Bows stand together across the street highlights the degree of removal she has, and will always have, from their family.



Abigail is shown to be again at a distance from the Bows in the aftermath of the fire. She was right that the day at the shore would be her last day in 1873, demonstrating how her own sense of wisdom and even clairvoyance has developed.



Abigail knows that it is time to go home. She has, over the course of her time with the Bows, been tempted to stay by many different factors—but now that Judah is revealed to be in love with Dovey, Abigail feels that there is nothing more holding her to this time. Abigail's physical growth here is a metaphor for her internal growth as well.



Granny tells Abigail that it must be Beatie alone who accompanies her back to the place where she first entered the past, and that it must be nearly dark, as it was on the night she first came. Abigail says her painful goodbyes to Dovey and Judah—Gibbie is asleep and Mr. Bow is in a kind of trance. Last of all, Abigail bids Granny farewell, and tells her that she wishes Granny were her real grandmother. Beatie angrily says it's time to go, and the two set off for the lane.

Abigail tells Beatie there's no reason for Beatie to still be angry at her, but Beatie insists that Abigail should not have kissed Judah. Abigail vindictively tells Beatie that she is going to burn the green **dress** as soon as she gets home so that she can never return, and the two grumpily and silently walk down the street.

At the end of the lane, Abigail tells Beatie that she should go to her teacher and ask to be tutored privately. Beatie replies that her father would not like for her to approach a man. Abigail tells her not to worry about what her father thinks, and instead look out for herself.

Abigail asks Beatie to stop hating her—Judah doesn't love her after all, and Abigail did end up saving Dovey for him. Beatie says Abigail was only doing what she was "sent for." Abigail, incensed, tells Beatie that she knows nothing about love, and will have to experience it to understand how powerful it is. She is then shocked to find that she is repeating the same words her mother once said to her—words she'd once thought were so foolish.

Beatie does not answer Abigail, and so Abigail bids her a glum goodbye before continuing down the stairs to the lower part of the lane. She looks back over her shoulder and sees Beatie growing transparent. She thinks she can see Beatie waving her goodbye, but by the time she calls out Beatie's name, it is too late—she is back in her own time.

Abigail sees the Mitchell building, and hears the bells of the Town Hall clock. She wonders if it could be possible that no time at all has passed—it is, after all, still winter, as it was when she first passed into 1873. Abigail nervously approaches her apartment building, afraid that in fact a full year has passed, and her mother will have moved on without her. As she enters the lobby, she realizes that she is still wearing Dovey's wool stockings and Granny's shoes. The key to her own apartment is pinned inside her green **dress**, and she rushes inside, grateful for the sounds of the noisy Crown family next door.

Abigail's goodbyes with the Bows are, for the most part, deeply emotional. As she sets off for the way back with Beatie, though, the little girl is markedly cold and impatient towards Abigail, demonstrating that she has still not gotten over her anger about Abigail's dalliance with Judah.



Abigail and Beatie have a fiery, contentious exchange as they approach the lane where Abigail will return to the present. When Abigail threatens to burn her dress, she is essentially telling Beatie that she doesn't care about seeing her any more.



Despite the anger between them, Abigail still wants Beatie to succeed and find fulfillment, and attempts to encourage the younger girl to pursue her dreams.



Abigail at last seeks absolution from Beatie, but Beatie is true to her steadfast, headstrong personality, and does not grant Abigail even an inch of relief. Abigail is so frustrated that she finds herself lashing out emotionally at Beatie, and attempting to impress upon the girl the same thing her own mother, not so long ago, tried to impress upon her when she herself was being impetuous and naïve.



Abigail will never know if Beatie softened, in the end, and wished her a proper goodbye, or if it was all a trick of the eye—the moment is lost forever in time.



Abigail is back in the present, but still bears the talismans of the past. Clothing, as it has always been throughout the novel, remains the point of connection between different people, different places, and different times. Abigail's clothing from two different worlds—this one, and the one of 1873—shows that she is returning to the present a more whole person, with a greater respect for history and for the power of time itself.



Abigail picks up a nearby newspaper and is relieved to see that the date is the 10th of May—the same day she left. So much has passed, she thinks, between just two clock strikes. Abigail longs to fall into the recliner and cry and rest for days—she will never see Judah again—but knows that she has little time before her mother will arrive home. Abigail runs to her bedroom and removes her old-timey **clothes**, stuffing them in a drawer. She catches sight of herself in the mirror and realizes how different she looks—most noticeably of all, her hair has grown nearly to her waist. She uses a pair of scissors to hack it off to her shoulders, and then jumps in the shower to wash herself.

When Abigail gets out of the bath, her mother is home. Despite the fact that they have “just” had a fight, Abigail cannot help grinning at her beloved mother. Her mother asks what she is smiling about, and how she could have run away without a word. Abigail apologizes for having been childish. Kathy then does a double-take, noticing that Abigail looks older. Kathy chides herself for not having paid enough attention to Abigail lately, and apologizes for going about in a fog.

Abigail and Kathy apologize to each other, and resolve to say not another word about Weyland that night. Abigail tries not to think of Judah, but as the night goes on, she has a hard time keeping him—and her jealous feelings toward Dovey—out of her head. She wonders if she has become just like all her lovesick classmates, but eventually decides that she is different than the others—Judah filled the empty place inside of her. Abigail resolves to try and forget as much as she can about everyone and everything in 1873, and puts herself to sleep.

In her dreams, Abigail has horrible visions of Samuel Bow chained up in an asylum. She sees Beatie, older and studious, bent over a leather-bound book. Beatie is dressed in black mourning clothes, and Abigail wonders whether Granny or Gibbie has died. The dream shifts again, and Abigail is on a ship—she sees Judah, the same age he was when she left 1873, whittling a small wooden figure of Abigail herself. He throws the figurine overboard, and Abigail wakes up crying and screaming. Her mother is at her side, comforting her—Abigail cannot stop moaning that Judah threw her away.

In the morning, Abigail goes with her mother to work at Magpies, the vintage shop. As Kathy sets to work cleaning up a set of Victorian portraits, she marvels at how colorful their **clothing** was. Abigail corrects her, stating that most people wore drab woolen things and striped stockings.

Abigail is excited to be back in the present, but also devastated by thoughts of all she has left behind. The fact that she sheds her clothes—her connection to the past—but still keeps them close to her and safe in her dresser drawer shows that though she may be back in the present, she will not forget the lessons learned, connections made, or emotions felt during her journey to the past.



Though Abigail has in truth matured externally as well as internally, her mother Kathy takes the visible change in her daughter as a sign that she has been ignoring her, a fact which speaks to the desire both women have for a deeper, more constant connection with one another.



As Abigail settles back into her life in the present, she uses the skills she harnessed for so many years to keep a calm exterior and betray none of the emotional or logistical chaos going on inside of her. Despite her happiness at being reunited with her mother, Abigail is still deeply saddened by the loss of the Bows, and specifically Judah. The memories are so painful that she attempts to sever herself from them to dull the hurt.



It is unclear whether Abigail's dreams are fictions or visions. Her portentous dream in the first chapter, in which she could smell the confectionery before she'd ever visited it and see the yellow fever rag tied to the door, set up the fact that Abigail herself has a touch of clairvoyance, but these present dreams are possibly just representative of her greatest anxieties about the fate of the Bow family.



Abigail, fresh from the Victorian era, displays her newfound knowledge of the customs of the past, showing up even her mother, who has a deep reverence for and familiarity with history.



Abigail tells her mother that she is going to take a walk around the Rocks. Before she goes, she hugs her mother and tells her that they can go to Norway with Weyland—she apologizes for making such a fuss. Kathy is stunned, but visibly excited.

Abigail shows that she has learned a lot and matured deeply in this passage as she accepts that her mother is motivated by love, and at last upholds her duty to keeping her family together.



Abigail heads up Argyle Street toward the Rocks, feeling as if she is going home. The street is bright and deserted. She cannot believe that it was only last night that she saw the street teeming with “ragged, grubby, and vital” life and people. Abigail is amazed and terrified that all trace of the Bows and Talliskers has vanished—she feels as if time is a “vast black hole” that swallows up all human joy and suffering. Abigail realizes, sickeningly, that the same thing will happen to herself and her own parents.

As Abigail wanders the vastly different Rocks district, the uncanny difference between the time she has just left and the time she now inhabits overwhelms her. She can see nothing of the world she got to know so well, and wonders if this means that time has no allegiance to anyone at all, and simply swallows up the stories of history and condemns them to obscurity.



Abigail feels as if the empty place inside her is empty once again—she cannot bear to be in the Rocks anymore, so she heads home. Once back in the building, she fetches her cut-off hair and her green **dress**, and takes the elevator down to the incinerator, where she burns everything. At the last minute, she pulls the crochet yoke out of the flames. She takes it upstairs, where she folds it up and places it in the drawer with Dovey’s stockings and Granny’s shoes.

Abigail is so upset after her walk through the Rocks that she longs to burn her final remaining connection to the past. At the last minute, however, she realizes that to do such a thing would not only be foolish, but would be a return to her old patterns of aloofness and disconnection. Instead she resolves to keep her clothing from the past—and thus symbolically her connection to it—safe and close at hand.



CHAPTER 12

A few days after Abigail’s return, Kathy brings Weyland home for dinner. He greets his daughter as “Lynnie” and embraces her. Abigail embraces him right back, and as she does, remembers being wrapped in Judah’s arms. Abigail stops herself from crying, though, telling herself that she is about to embark on a whole new life, and soon the world of Beatie Bow will be a distant memory. Abigail apologizes for being such a “dope” to her father, and Kathy leaves the two of them alone to catch up.

Abigail has held off connection to and love for her father for so long that when she finally embraces it, she is overwhelmed by it. She learned to accept the power of love through Judah, and so as she finally yields to love, it is Judah she remembers, but the memory is nearly too much for her to bear, and she again hedges towards old patterns of forgetting and disconnecting.



Weyland tells Abigail all about Norway, and she admits that she is excited for a new adventure. He tries to explain about his mistress, but Abigail cuts him off, telling him that she understands. Together, over dinner, the family decides that Abigail will complete one more term of school while Kathy ties up her loose ends at the shop, and the two prepare themselves for a long Norwegian winter.

As she reconnects with her father and forgives him of his guilt, Abigail demonstrates the wisdom she has accrued through her journey to the past, and the transformative and powerful experience of love she encountered there.



Abigail's long years of keeping her feelings to herself prove useful during this time—she knows that neither her mother nor her father has any clue as to what is really going on inside of her. Abigail feels that the empty place inside of her has grown desolate.

Abigail still takes Natalie and Vincent to the playground sometimes, but the children have given up playing Beatie Bow, and now play something else. Natalie wistfully tells Abigail that she never sees the “little furry girl” anymore. Abigail tells Natalie that the little girl is probably home, brushing her hair and hoping it will grow in time for her brother's wedding. Natalie laughs, delighted by the story she believes Abigail is making up. She asks Abigail to continue it, but Abigail refuses, having made herself sad with thoughts of the Bows—she realizes that she is homesick not just for Judah, but for all of them.

Abigail is determined to find out what became of all the Bows, and she wants to do so before she leaves Australia, so that she can think of them when she is in Norway. Though she knows looking up the Bows is like rubbing salt in an old wound, she heads to the Public Library's newspaper rooms and asks for files dating back to 1873 and 1874. Uncertain of what she is looking for, she flips through the papers, hoping for any sign. As she flips blithely through the ads and small announcements, she is taken aback by an article describing the sinking of a ship called *The Brothers* on the fourth of February, 1874. She realizes with a horrible feeling that *The Brothers* was the name of Judah's ship.

Abigail walks home in a daze, feeling as if her body is moving without her mind's control or consent. She reaches into her dresser drawer and pulls out the **crochet**. She speaks aloud to Granny, begging her to warn Judah. The crochet is very damaged, though, and as she tries to call to Granny, she fears she will have no success—until the room begins to ripple, and she realizes she has been suspended somewhere between Mitchell and the Rocks, as if in a dream. She sees Beatie, Granny, and Samuel walking through the street in their best clothes, with Judah and Dovey close behind—they have clearly just been married. She calls to the Bows, but they cannot hear her. Judah looks in Abigail's direction, but seems to see right through her.

Abigail yet again reverts to old patterns of keeping herself at arm's length from those who love her, and as a result, the empty place inside expands.



Just as at the beginning of the novel, Abigail seeks connection with the Crown children when connection with her own family is too hard. Being with the Crowns, though, just stirs up painful and unwanted memories of the Bows, and forces Abigail to think about what the Bows are doing—or, rather, did—without her in their lives.



Rather than cut herself off from thoughts of the Bows, Abigail decides to lean into her desire for more knowledge of them, and thus a deeper connection to them. What she finds, however, shakes her to her core—she realizes that Judah, her beloved, perished just months after she left the Bows behind. Abigail is now in possession of a new kind of wisdom, and perhaps, if she can make it back to the past in time, a special kind of power.



Abigail is grateful to have not burned the crochet, as she realizes that it is her only and final chance to connect with the Bows and perhaps warn them of the tragedy that is to come their way. When Abigail glimpses the past, however, she sees that the Bows are caught up in their joy, and is again positioned as an outsider not even on the periphery of their vision or thoughts. Abigail is obscure to them—she has been swallowed by the future, when she feared it was the Bows who had been swallowed by the past.



The scene begins to lose its color and fade. Abigail sees Granny look around searchingly for a moment, as if she has heard something, but it is too late—Abigail is back in her own time, and the **crochet** is threads in her hands. Abigail attempts to comfort herself by telling herself that perhaps Judah did not ship out on *The Brothers* on its fateful, final voyage, but cannot convince herself of this fully. Once again, in her head, she bids Judah good-bye.

Abigail has attempted to make one final connection with the world she left behind, but it is an unsuccessful one. To symbolize the termination of her physical connection to the world of the Bows, the crochet has turned to nothing in the palms of her hands, leaving her with only her memories.



CHAPTER 13

Four years later, Abigail Kirk is nearly eighteen years old, and the Kirk family has returned to Sydney after living abroad in several countries for the last few years. As Abigail, Kathy, and Weyland step into their old apartment unit, they notice that it has grown grubbier over the years. Abigail thinks the place looks somehow smaller and larger at the same time, and wonders if she, too, has changed in odd ways over the years. As she considers herself in the bathroom mirror, she notes that her cheeks have thinned and her hair has lightened over the course of the “curious” past four years.

The time jump is a narrative tool that allows readers to see how Abigail has, long-term, processed the events that occurred in her fourteenth year. As Abigail returns to the place she once called home, she feels that it has changed—but then considers that maybe it is just she herself who is different.



For the first year after her return from the past, Abigail’s memories of the Bow family were “bitterly real” and caused her grief and longing, especially when she considered Judah and his awful fate. Even if she could never share a life with him, she’d wanted him to have a beautiful one. Abigail would try and convince herself, in her lowest moments, that she had dreamed the whole thing, though she knew it was not so.

When she was forced to face the pain of her great losses, Abigail found herself retreating into old behaviors—attempting to distance herself from pain or discomfort by denying the connection she had with the thing causing her sadness. This had worked for years back when Abigail tried to ignore her father; but with the Bows, she could not sever the cord.



Abigail tells her mother that she’s going to go next door and see if the Crowns still live there. She rings the doorbell and is surprised when Vincent, now much taller and probably ten or eleven years old, opens the door. She asks him if he remembers her, and he smiles happily, revealing that he does. Justine is happy to see Abigail, too—Abigail asks after Natalie, and Justine tells Abigail that Natalie is out shopping with someone called Robert, as today is her eighth birthday. Abigail worries aloud that Natalie won’t recognize her. Vincent goes off to practice piano, and Justine expresses to Abigail her relief that Vincent has calmed down over the last several years, largely in part due to his fascination with music.

Abigail seeks out her old friends the Crowns, demonstrating her need for connection in the slightly disorienting and perhaps even painful moment of return to the place where she grew up. Abigail realizes how much she has changed, and wants to see if everything else around her has changed too—this shows that she now has a vested interest in connecting with things from her past, as opposed to the start of the novel, when she was ambivalent at best about them.



Abigail tells Justine that she thought her husband's name was Bill, and asks who Robert is—Justine answers that Robert is her younger brother, and at twenty, is Natalie's favorite uncle. Justine asks Abigail to tell her about all the affairs she must have had with "glamorous" Norwegian men, and Abigail coyly admits that she has had a few. A few minutes later, the doorbell rings, and Natalie rushes in with all of her parcels—the second she spots Abigail, though, she shrieks with delight and drops them on the ground, embracing Abigail and telling her that she would know her anywhere.

As Abigail hugs Natalie, she wonders whether Natalie truly remembers their time together. Just then, Natalie leans in and whispers to Abigail, asking if she remembers the little furry girl, who was always their little secret. There is a fumbling at the door, and Natalie exclaims that it's Robert, with the rest of her birthday presents. Justine goes to open the door and a tall young man walks in—upon seeing him, Abigail fears she might faint. He looks and sounds almost exactly like Judah, and for a moment, Abigail is afraid that everything is starting again—that she is returning to the past.

The Crowns converse with one another casually, and then Justine introduces Abigail to the young man—her brother, Robert Bow. The young man, upon meeting Abigail's eye, exclaims, "Abby!" but instantly turns red and seems taken aback by his own forwardness. He apologizes, and tells Abigail that for just a moment he thought he knew her.

While Natalie opens her presents with Vincent and her mother, Robert and Abigail talk with one another. Abigail can hardly focus on Robert's words, though—she is too overcome with relief, believing that Judah lived after all. She wishes she could reach out and stroke Robert's cheek, but she remembers that he does not know all that she knows. She realizes that Justine's maiden name must be Bow, as well. She coyly tells Robert that she knew some Bows once, and befriended a Bow named Judah. Robert exclaims that his own middle name is Judah.

As Robert and Abigail converse, she finds it easy and natural to talk to him. Robert tells Abigail that he is in a marine engineering course, and has a feeling that his ancestors came from Shetland, and that the sea is in his genes. Abigail corrects him, telling him the Bows are from Orkney. Before she leaves, Robert asks Abigail if he can come by and see her, and she tells him that he can—she's right next door.

The fact that Abigail admits to having had relationships with boys while she was abroad speaks to the transformative power of her first love. With the Bows, Abigail opened herself up to love, and over the course of the past four years, she has apparently nurtured this part of herself in a way she never did before. As a result, she seems to have had at least a few meaningful romantic connections with people.



When Abigail sees Justine's brother for the first time, she is seized with amazement and a tinge of fear. She is so struck by the resemblance between Robert and Judah that she does not have time to consider a logical explanation for the resemblance, and instead believes for just a moment that she is again being taken into the past.



The fact that Robert, too, reacts strangely in Abigail's presence speaks to the, uncanny, unexplainable connections that echo through time. It's almost as if he is a reincarnation of Judah, who still has vague memories of Abigail.



As Abigail gets her bearings back and attempts to figure out what is going on, she is quickly overcome with joy. She believes that Judah did get to live the life he so cherished after all, and this cheers her; moreover, she is drawn to Robert, who she believes is a descendant of Judah's. She goes so far as to flirt teasingly with him about her strange history with the Bow family, a secret she has seemingly revealed to no one else.



Robert's affection for the sea again serves to cement the strange echoes of the past through the years. Robert and Abigail are clearly drawn to one another, and make plans to see each other again.



When Abigail returns to her own apartment, her mother asks her who she has met over at the Crowns' who has given her such a look on her face. She tells Kathy that she has met a young man named Robert, and he'll be coming by on Saturday to look over a family tree with her.

On Saturday, Robert arrives with his family Bible in hand. As the two of them sit down to begin, Abigail notices the small ways in which he looks, after all, quite different from Judah. They open the Bible, and Robert tells Abigail that the book belonged to "some old great-great aunt" who was the headmistress at a school in Sydney—the aunt had "petrified" Robert's mother. Abigail is delighted, knowing that Beatie "made it" after all. Robert seems confused, and Abigail promises him that after they have looked over the family tree, she will explain things to him a little bit—the rest, she tells him, will have to wait until they know each other "lots better." Robert responds that if he has anything to say about it, they'll know each other well very soon.

In the kitchen, Robert opens the Bible to a page bearing the Bow family tree. Abigail, without looking at it, immediately asks where Robert's great-grandfather, Judah is on it—Robert replies that Judah is only a family name, and his great-grandfather's name was Samuel. Abigail insists that Samuel was Beatie and Gibbie and Judah's father. Robert points out Gilbert Samuel Bow, who, according to the dates on the tree, lived a long and healthy life. Abigail realizes that Judah must have drowned, after all, and that Robert is descended from Gilbert. Abigail begins sobbing, and Robert puts his arms around her, in no way put off by Abigail's tears and ramblings about the Bow children.

Robert asks Abigail to calm down and tell him how she knows so many things about his family—things even he doesn't know—and then kisses away her tears. Abigail tells him everything that happened, and is relieved to find that Robert listens to her quite seriously. When she's done with her tale, Robert insists that Natalie must have had something to do with everything that happened—after all, she is a Bow, he says, and is perhaps in possession of the legendary Gift. Abigail realizes that Granny's Prophecy was right in some ways and wrong in others—Granny assumed that Gibbie would die and Beatie would be barren, when really it was "Judah for death, and Dovey for barrenness."

Whereas Abigail once cultivated a stony exterior that let no one see how she was feeling inside, in this passage her mother is able to read her like a book, showing that Abigail has become less guarded and more open.



Robert and Abigail have an almost dizzyingly intense connection, which has fallen upon both of them fast as lightning. As they connect over the Bow family history, Abigail is relieved to realize that her tough and beloved Beatie did after all fulfill her dreams and become a successful scholar. As the pieces of the puzzle begin to come together for Abigail, she is still afraid to confess everything to Robert, but teases that she has information to share.



Abigail is shocked and saddened to realize that Judah did not live, after all. Gibbie, who had been assumed by not just Abigail but all of the Bows to be the one who would die at a young age, ultimately was the one to carry on the Bow family name, and most important of all, the Gift. When Abigail saved Gibbie from the fire almost as an afterthought, she was really fulfilling her destiny.



As Abigail realizes that she was indeed successful in carrying out her role as the Stranger—though not necessarily in the precise way she thought—she is overwhelmed by the fact that a Bow, and perhaps the last remaining Bow with the Gift, was living right next door to her for so many years. This passage shows the complex and unpredictable nature of time and legacy, and how the past can endure in surprising ways.



Robert points out, however, that Dovey—or Dorcas, as he knows her—wasn't barren—she had a child named Judith, but it died alongside Dovey and Granny during a smallpox outbreak. Abigail marvels aloud that getting Gibbie out of the fire, more than Dovey, was important to carrying on the Bow line. As Abigail rants on and on, she pauses, and tells Robert that she is amazed that he believes her. Robert confesses that he experienced a strange sensation the moment he met her, as if he'd always known her.

Abigail spends a quiet moment thinking about Granny Tallisker and her “infinite goodness and strength.” Abigail sees now, too, that time is not a “great black vortex down which everything disappear[s].” Time, Abigail realizes, is a great river—always changing, but the same water flowing from source to sea.

Kathy comes into the kitchen and asks Abigail what she and Robert are up to. Abigail coyly replies that they are “just playing Beatie Bow.” Though her mother doesn't understand, it doesn't matter—Robert does.

Abigail and Robert seem to connect more and more deeply by the second as they tear through and piece together the Bow family history. Abigail is amazed by the strange twists and turns that the Prophecy took, and mesmerized by all the things that happened to the Bows which she never knew about.



Abigail feared once that the Bows were completely lost to time. Now that she has found Robert, though, she realizes that their legacy is alive and thriving, and that she herself has had a large part in ensuring that this happened.



Robert and Abigail have a deep, meaningful, and private connection, born out of their mutual link to the history of the Bows and the sense of reverence for and duty to the same legacy.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "Playing Beatie Bow." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Jul 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "Playing Beatie Bow." LitCharts LLC, July 25, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/playing-beatie-bow>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Playing Beatie Bow* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Park, Ruth. *Playing Beatie Bow*. Puffin Books. 1980.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Park, Ruth. *Playing Beatie Bow*. London: Puffin Books. 1980.