

Son of a Trickster



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDEN ROBINSON

Eden Robinson was born in Kitamaat, British Columbia and is part of the Haisla and Heiltsuk First Nations. She received a BA from the University of Victoria and an MFA from the University of British Columbia. In 1995, Robinson published her first book, *Traplines*, a collection of four short stories. The collection won Britain's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Her second book and first novel, *Monkey Beach*, was published in 2000 and received the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. In 2003, Robinson moved back to Kitamaat Village to care for her father, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 1998. Her third book, *Blood Sports*, was published in 2006 and returned to the characters of one of the short stories in *Traplines*. *Son of a Trickster*, the first book of a planned trilogy, was published in 2017. The second book, *Trickster Drift*, was published in 2018, and Robinson again won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize for her sequel. In 2019, Robinson was diagnosed with polymyalgia rheumatica, an inflammatory disorder that makes it difficult to write, though she continues to do so. Robinson still lives in Kitamaat and plans to publish the third book in the Trickster trilogy in 2021.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Son of a Trickster's events are based in the real-life history of Kitamaat Village (the reserve at the center of the Haisla Nation), the Eurocan paper mill shutdown, and the Idle No More movement. The Haisla have occupied Kitamaat village for hundreds of years, and today about half of the 1,700 Haisla people live in Kitamaat Village. Jared, the protagonist of *Son of a Trickster*, lives in the nearby town of Kitimat. The Na'Na'Kila Institute was established in 1998 to help protect Haisla culture, and in the novel, Sarah is very interested in learning the Haisla language and taking part in that culture—an outgrowth of the renewed interest from many Native youth in reconnecting to their heritage. Robinson also draws on the real-life shut down of the Eurocan paper mill in Kitimat in 2010, which resulted in 500 people losing jobs and devastated the surrounding community. In *Son of a Trickster*, Jared's dad worked for the paper mill, and the family struggled as a result of its closure. Lastly, Robinson mentions the real-life Idle No More movement, which the Sarah gets involved in. Idle No More is an ongoing protest movement founded in December 2012 by three First Nations women and one non-Native ally. It is a grassroots movement for Indigenous rights and stopping environmental degradation.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In *Son of a Trickster*, Robinson draws on Heiltsuk and Haisla mythology, particularly in her rendering of the trickster raven Wee'git. These stories mostly exist in oral tradition, but a few books about the raven have been published: *Raven Brings the Light*, *Raven's Feast*, and *The Raven Steals the Light*. Robinson has stated that she was inspired by several other books about tricksters, such as *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle; *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Nalo Hopkinson; *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass* by Drew Hayden Taylor; *One Good Story, That One* by Thomas King; and *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich. Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* is another contemporary book that draws on several different trickster mythologies. Like *Son of a Trickster*, Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Party-Time Indian* is a gritty coming-of-age story that centers on an Indigenous teenager (though Alexie's protagonist is Native American rather than First Nations Canadian). Lastly, *Son of a Trickster* has a sequel, *Trickster Drift*, and Robinson has also planned a third book in the trilogy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Son of a Trickster
- **When Written:** 2009–2017
- **Where Written:** Kitamaat, British Columbia
- **When Published:** February 7, 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** Kitimat, British Columbia, 2002–2013
- **Climax:** Jared escapes the river otters.
- **Antagonist:** David; Richie
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

As Seen on TV. *Son of a Trickster* was made into a CBC television show called *Trickster*, which premiered in late 2020. The second season, based on the sequel *Trickster Drift*, is due to follow.

Quoth the Raven. The trickster raven Wee'git in *Son of a Trickster* is a common figure in the mythology of many Indigenous Nations on the Pacific Northwest Coast, not just in Haisla culture. The raven is typically portrayed as a trickster shapeshifter figure, though sometimes it's also a creator figure.



PLOT SUMMARY

Jared Martin doesn't get along with his maternal grandmother, Anita, who dislikes him because she thinks he is the son of the raven Trickster Wee'git. When Jared is five years old, he and his mom and dad move to Kitimat, British Columbia. During his childhood, his paternal grandmother, Nana Sophia, tells him that she did a DNA test on him, which determined that he's part 'Namgis and part Heiltsuk. She also assures Jared that he isn't Wee'git's son. But Anita tells him that a scientific test wouldn't be able to determine this, and she warns him to be careful if Wee'git ever visits.

Years later, when Jared is a teenager, he has to euthanize pit bull, Baby Killer. Jared got Baby Killer a few years earlier when a biker gang threatened his mom, forcing her to pay an ex-boyfriend's debts to them. One man in the gang, Richie, tried to sic his two pit bulls on Jared, but Jared's mom ran over one of the dogs. After this, his mother began dating Richie for protection, and Richie's other pit bull, Baby Killer, became immediately attached to Jared. After Jared and his mom put Baby Killer down, Jared cries and drinks beer.

Some days after school, Jared helps his elderly neighbors Mr. Jaks (who has memory problems) and Mrs. Jaks (who has leukemia) around their home. He also plays video games and gets high with his friends, Blake and Kelsey. One day, when Jared is on his way home, a raven starts talking to him, and he thinks that the marijuana is causing him to hallucinate. Later, on a bus, a Native man tells Jared that he is Wee'git and that he is Jared's real father, but Jared thinks the man is crazy. Around the same time, Jared starts to hear an unfamiliar voice in his head, but he thinks that he's simply going insane.

Jared bakes and sells cookies with marijuana in them to help his dad pay rent, as his dad is having trouble getting a disability check from his insurance. Jared's dad has an old back injury that still flares up, he's become addicted to pain medication. His dad also has a stepdaughter named Destiny, who is pregnant at 17. Jared knows that his mom would be furious if she found out he was helping his dad, but he doesn't want his dad and stepsister to be homeless.

Just before Jared's Christmas break, Nana Sophia messages him on Facebook and gives him some money, imploring him not to give it to his parents. Over the holidays, Jared blacks out from drinking too much at parties, and one morning, he wakes up in an unfamiliar house. A nerdy boy named George took him in for the evening, and they quickly become friends. Soon after this, Jared discovers that his dad has actually been getting his disability checks and has been lying so that Jared will give him money. He's upset, but he gives his dad the money anyway.

One day, when Jared goes to check on the Jakses, he and meets their granddaughter Sarah, who is now staying with them. Sarah is pretty, sarcastic, and very interested in Indigenous

culture; Jared immediately takes a liking to her. He wakes the next day in bed with Sarah, unsure of how they got together. After this, they quickly grow closer.

A few weeks into dating Sarah, Jared's mother finds out that he's helping his dad, and she completely destroys his room. For a few weeks, Jared stays at different friends' houses and gets drunk for days at a time. One day, he wakes up in a motel and has to hitchhike home. An old Native woman stops to help him, but he sees something like a monster writhing beneath her skin and runs away from her, afraid. Jared eventually returns home, but his mom is gone.

In May, with a little over a month left in school, Jared's mom is still missing. He desperately scrounges money to pay the utility bills and feed himself. Finally, Jared messages Nana Sophia, who offers to let him stay with her for the summer. Jared knows that his mom will disown him over this betrayal, but he doesn't care anymore.

Soon after, the electricity is shut off at Jared's house. Meanwhile, he and Sarah get high together, and he notices that she cuts herself. Sarah tries to get Jared to spank her or let her tie him up when they have sex, but he refuses. He tells her about his mom's abusive ex-boyfriend, David, who broke Jared's ribs and got an erection while doing so. When his mom found them, she used a nail gun to nail David's feet to the floor. Due to this incident, Jared doesn't want to hurt Sarah or be hurt. Sarah then takes psychedelic mushrooms and cuts herself in front of Jared, and Jared doesn't know how to react.

After five weeks, Jared's mom returns home, shaking from the drugs she's on. She tells Jared that it was all she could do not to strangle him for helping his dad. They reconcile, but the next day, Jared finds his mom high on drugs, plucking out her eyebrows. When he tries to stop her, she stabs him with her tweezers.

Soon after this, Sarah comes over to Jared's with more psychedelic mushrooms, but he refuses to take them. Sarah starts tripping and seeing fireflies above her. Then, one of the cuts on her palm opens up, and she places her hand on Jared's forehead. This transports her and Jared to a prehistoric wasteland, where he sees ape-like men crawling toward them. Jared thinks that he must be dreaming and forces himself to wake up. After this incident, he starts seeing the ape men everywhere, though he again tries to convince himself that he must have taken mushrooms. Later that evening, Jared hears Baby Killer's bark at the door, but he knows that it can't really be her.

A few days later, Jared goes back to the Jakses', noticing that they've put up a "FOR SALE" sign. Jared and Sarah sob in the kitchen about Sarah leaving and about Mrs. Jaks's worsening cancer. Jared can still see the magical fireflies, which swarm above Sarah constantly. That evening, Jared and Sarah curl up on the couch together, and Jared tells Sarah that he loves her.

When she doesn't return the sentiment, he leaves.

On the way home, Jared sees a vision of Baby Killer, as well one of a "Fake Sarah," both of whom try to lure him into the woods. Fake Sarah tells Jared that human beings are killing the world and so they have to die, and she transforms into a river otter. A pack of otters appears behind her, and Jared runs back to his basement. When he texts Nana Sophia asking what she knows about river otters, she replies that she's booking a plane immediately.

The next day, when Jared tells his mother about the otters, she reveals to Jared that she, Mrs. Jaks, and Sarah are witches, and Nana Sophia is Halayt. She says that they have to protect themselves from the river otters, so she initiates some hexes. Meanwhile, Jared gets a panicked phone call from Sarah that Mrs. Jaks collapsed on the floor and isn't breathing—but when Jared starts to run over to her house, someone knocks him out.

Jared wakes up in a cave surrounded by the river otters, who bite off one of his toes and burn the wound with a lighter. They lament that Jared doesn't taste powerful and decide to use him as bait to catch his mom. Just as they're about to eat more of his fingers and toes, Wee'git arrives in the form of a raven and stops time. He says that Jared is his son and implores him to transform into something that can fly away. Jared is upset that Wee'git has been watching him for so long and never interfered to help him before, like when David broke his ribs. He refuses to go with Wee'git, and the river otters attack Wee'git while Jared makes his escape.

After Jared gets stitched up and returns home, he tells Nana Sophia—who has just arrived—that he isn't really her grandson. Nana Sophia is furious, and Jared can see a pterodactyl snapping its beak under her skin. She coldly writes him a check for the money Jared's dad owes him and leaves, and Jared sobs over losing the one person who always loved him. He then takes the money and gives it to his dad, explaining that he doesn't need it. For the next few days, Jared rests at home. When he asks his mother about Wee'git, she tells him that she shot Wee'git in the head and sank him in the ocean because he messed with her and Anita—but he still came back.

That same day, Jared returns to the Jakses', whose house has now been packed up. As he and Sarah have sex one last time, Sarah can see the fireflies, and Jared sees that their skin is starting to shred into thin air. Terrified, he gets up and leaves the house, afraid that he might disintegrate entirely. The next day, Jared learns that Sarah took magic mushrooms and cut herself, causing her to be hospitalized for her injuries. When Jared tries to visit her at the house when she returns, Sarah's mom is there, and she blames him for what happened. Soon after, Jared meets up with Sarah. She tells him that the sex they had made her feel alive for the first time and that she loves him, but Jared doesn't think he can be with her anymore. The next morning, Sarah's mother drives her off to rehab.

A few days later, when Jared is drunk after a party, Jwa'sins (the Native woman with the monster under her skin) arrives on Jared's street. She tells him that she is Wee'git's sister, and she brings Jared to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. At first, Jared is skeptical and a little embarrassed at being there while drunk, but ultimately, he's moved by the meeting and strives to stay sober. He gets a job at Dairy Queen, does his homework, and hangs out with George more often. The one person who is not pleased with Jared's sobriety is his mom, who thinks that Jared is judging her for her lifestyle. But Jared ignores his mom's wrath—he feels empowered by his sobriety.

Jared then decides to reconcile with Anita, and he tells her about meeting Wee'git and Jwa'sins. Anita replies that she loves Jared, and she warns him to be careful when interacting with these beings.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jared Martin – Jared is the 16-year-old protagonist of *Son of a Trickster*. He lives in Kitimat, British Columbia and is a member of the Heiltsuk and 'Namgis Nations. Jared had a tough upbringing, as his mom and dad divorced after his dad experienced a back injury at work and consequently became addicted to painkillers. Jared's mom, who is emotionally volatile, won sole custody him and subsequently dated a series of abusive boyfriends, including one named David who broke Jared's ribs. As a result of David's actions, Jared is very uncomfortable with violence in his life, and he prefers relationships based in unconditional love, like the ones he shares with his dog Baby Killer and his paternal grandmother, Nana Sophia. Because of Jared's dysfunctional family life, he becomes much more responsible than most of his peers: for example, he helps his dad pay rent (though he's only able to do so because he sells marijuana cookies). He also keeps up the house when his mom abandons him for months while she's high on drugs. Jared also illustrates his responsibility by taking care of his elderly neighbors, Mr. Jaks and Mrs. Jaks, and by emotionally supporting his girlfriend, Sarah. However, even though Jared is more responsible than the typical teenager, the hardship in his life leads him to try and avoid his problems. Jared drinks and smokes marijuana frequently as a coping mechanism, but this often leads him to get into fights or become violently ill. Jared also tries to avoid increasingly strange occurrences in his life, like the trickster raven Wee'git telling him that he is Jared's real father, or visions of prehistoric "ape men" climbing up from his **basement**. But because Jared doesn't face these problems head-on, he ultimately endangers himself and those around him, getting captured by violent river otters who bite off one of his toes. By the end of the novel, Jared accepts the magic in his life and his true identity as Wee'git's son, and he also starts to go to Alcoholics Anonymous

meetings and finds empowerment in his sobriety. Both of these developments suggest that confronting his problems directly is the only way that Jared regains some control of his life.

Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom – Maggie Moody is Jared's mom, Phil's ex-wife, and Anita's daughter. She's extremely aggressive and violent, and she often takes her anger out on Jared. After Maggie and Jared's dad divorce, she dates a series of abusive boyfriends. The first of these, David, breaks Jared's ribs, and so Jared's mom uses a nail gun to nail his feet to the floor. Another, Richie, sets his dogs on Jared before they start dating, and she saves Jared by running over one of the dogs with her car. In this way, Maggie often uses violence to protect Jared, but this makes their relationship complicated, because Jared never feels warm, unconditional love from her. This is particularly true in the second half of the book, when Maggie learns that Jared is helping his dad (whom she hates) and destroys his **bedroom** as punishment. She then abandons Jared for weeks in the house alone. Even when she returns, she uses drugs frequently and lashes out at Jared, at one point even stabbing him with tweezers. Ultimately, Maggie also reveals that she is a witch, and that Jared is actually the son of the trickster raven Wee'git, whom she tried to kill by shooting him in the head. The end of the book leaves Maggie and Jared's relationship on a sour note: as Jared tries to get more control over his life by getting sober, Maggie violently lashes out at him because she assumes that he is judging her lifestyle. Overall, Jared's relationship with his mother illustrates that because of her instability, Jared has had to grow up a lot faster than he might have otherwise.

Sarah Jaks – Sarah is Mr. Jaks and Mrs. Jaks's granddaughter and Jared's girlfriend. After the Christmas break, Sarah's mom sends her to help care for her grandparents after Mrs. Jaks is diagnosed with leukemia. Sarah is sarcastic and politically active—she is very involved in First Nations issues and brings Jared to attend the Idle No More protest to advocate for better environmental policies. Soon after Jared meets Sarah at the Jakses' house, they have sex, though Jared doesn't remember exactly how they ended up together. Over the following weeks, they grow closer, often getting high together. Sarah tries to get Jared to be more violent in their sexual relationship, but Jared admits this makes him uncomfortable and that he doesn't want to hurt her or be hurt. Jared feels the most in love with her when they're being playful together or caring for the Jakses. Though Sarah doesn't know it, she is a witch, and she often feels like she's asleep and is trying to “wake up” (that is, engage with her supernatural abilities). To do so, Sarah often cuts herself and takes LSD or psychedelic mushrooms in order to feel more alive. Ultimately, Sarah cuts herself so severely that she is hospitalized both for her injuries and for psychiatric treatment, and because Jared refuses to engage in magic with her, they break up.

Phil Martin/Jared's Dad – Phil is Jared's dad, Maggie's ex-

husband, and Nana Sophia's son. During Jared's childhood, Phil is honest and good-natured, often trying to balance out Maggie's volatility. But after Phil breaks his back at work and then loses his job, he begins to spiral. He quickly becomes addicted to pain killers, and during his physical therapy sessions, he falls in love with another woman named Shirley. Due to his addiction and infidelity, Maggie wins sole custody of Jared in the divorce, and Phil moves out to live with Shirley. Maggie refuses to let Jared talk to Phil or any of his family members, but Jared knows that his dad is struggling. As such, Jared files his father's disability insurance papers and starts to sell cookies with marijuana in them in order to help his father pay the rent. This illustrates how Jared and his dad have reversed roles—Jared takes on the role of a parent, while his dad needs to be cared for much like a child does. However, Jared is deeply hurt when he discovers that his father is getting disability checks but has been accepting money from Jared anyway, causing Jared to completely cut himself off from Phil.

Wee'git/The Voice – Wee'git is a trickster figure in Heiltsuk and Haisla mythology who often takes the form of a raven. When Jared is growing up, Nana Sophia and Anita worry that Jared might actually be Wee'git's son and not Phil's, but Nana Sophia is satisfied when she has a DNA test done on Jared. Anita and Maggie tell Jared that Wee'git has messed with their family, though they never reveal exactly what he did. After Jared's first act of magic (popping out of his body after David assaults him), Wee'git appears to Jared as a talking raven. Jared also hears an inner voice that he's unsure is coming from himself, which is later revealed to be Wee'git's. Each time, Jared assumes that the voice is evidence that he's going crazy, or that the ravens are drug-induced hallucinations. However, at the end of the book, Wee'git comes to rescue Jared from the magical river otters who have attacked Jared, and he explains that he is actually Jared's father. Jared is upset that Wee'git abandoned him for so much of his life, and he refuses to escape with him. However, Wee'git does prove his desire to be there for Jared, as he sacrifices himself to the river otters so that Jared to escape.

Nana Sophia – Nana Sophia is Jared's paternal grandmother and Phil's mother. Nana Sophia is 'Namgis. When Jared is young, she worries that he might be Wee'git's son, not Phil's, so she has a DNA test done on Jared, which determines that he is Phil's son. Unlike many of Jared's relationships, Nana Sophia openly expresses her affection for Jared, and he values the love she shows him. She also knows how irresponsible his parents can be, so she sends him money periodically. When Jared's mom disappears for weeks, Jared asks to stay with Nana Sophia for the summer, and she excitedly plans to host him. At the end of the book, Jared learns that Nana Sophia is Halayt (a high chief medicine woman) and also that he is, in fact, Wee'git's son—the DNA test showed a false result. Learning this, Nana Sophia coldly cuts Jared out of her life, and Jared sobs at losing

the one person he knew he could rely on—demonstrating the value he found in having a bond based solely on love, not on violent passion.

Destiny – Destiny is Jared’s stepsister, Phil’s stepdaughter, and Shirley’s daughter. At the beginning of the book, 17-year-old Destiny is pregnant and living in Phil’s apartment. After she has her baby, Ben, Jared helps Destiny buy groceries, and he also helps pay his dad’s rent, knowing that if he lost the apartment, Ben and Destiny would also be homeless. Even though Destiny has a baby, she is still immature: for instance, one weekend she leaves Jared with Ben and goes to a party for the whole evening, without telling Jared where she’s going. Later, at a holiday party, she impulsively kisses Jared because he’s the only person who treats her decently. By the end of the novel, Destiny and Ben move out of Phil’s apartment and into a shelter.

Baby Killer – Baby Killer is Jared’s pit bull. Originally, Baby Killer belonged to Richie. But when Richie moved in with Jared and his mom, Baby Killer became immediately attached to Jared: she followed him around, snuggled with him in bed, and licked his face when he was sad. Baby is one of Jared’s healthiest relationships, because she provides him with unconditional love—which is ironic, given the fact that she is a named Baby Killer and might have been expected to be a violent dog. The bond that they share is what makes Jared particularly devastated when he has to euthanize Baby due to her heartworm.

Anita Moody – Anita is Jared’s maternal grandmother and Maggie’s mother. When Jared is growing up, Anita hates him because she suspects that he is Wee’git’s son—and Wee’git has caused her family a lot of trouble over the years. Later, Jared learns that Anita grew up with nuns who taught her that everything Native was evil. Additionally, when Anita got tuberculosis as a girl, she was put in a sanatorium and nearly died. At the end of the book, Jared reconnects with Anita, acknowledging that she is tough and admitting that he intends on staying away from Wee’git. In response, Anita apologizes for the way she treated Jared as a boy.

Richie – Richie is Jared’s mom’s boyfriend, whom she dates after Death Threat. Richie and Jared’s mom meet when Death Threat leaves town because he owes Richie money, and Richie threatens Jared and his mom in order to collect on the debt. Richie sets two pit bulls on Jared, but his mom rescues Jared by running over one of the dogs with her car. Afterward, she and Richie start dating in the hope that Richie can protect her from other, more threatening people. Richie and Jared have a tense relationship, as Richie constantly threatens to beat him up.

Mrs. Jaks – Mrs. Jaks is Jared’s neighbor, Mr. Jaks’s husband, and Sarah’s grandmother. Mrs. Jaks is Native, and she and Jared meet in a dream when Jared “sleepwalks” out of his body. When Jared’s mom spends time in jail and anger management, Jared stays with Mr. and Mrs. Jaks and looks after them. Even

when his mom returns, Jared keeps an eye on the Jakses, helps with yardwork, and watches Mr. Jaks—particularly when Mrs. Jaks learns that she has leukemia. Toward the end of the book, Jared’s mom reveals that Mrs. Jaks is a witch.

Jwa’sins – Jwa’sins is Wee’git’s sister. She appears to Jared several times to try to convince him that magic is real, but Jared isn’t receptive to it. He observes that there is a monster under Jwa’sins’s skin, and she tells him that this is because she doesn’t use her magic—but Jared thinks that he is just hallucinating from drugs and alcohol. At the end of the book, Jwa’sins takes Jared to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting so that he can regain some control over his life.

Dylan Wilkinson – Dylan is one of Jared’s classmates and Mr. Wilkinson’s son. Dylan is a popular boy on the hockey team who often picks on Jared, but when Dylan’s girlfriend Ebony teams up with Jared to make marijuana cookies, Dylan and Jared become friends. Later, however, Jared grows tired with Dylan, who often gets drunk, doesn’t clean up his messes, and constantly complains when Ebony breaks up with him. In contrast to Jared, who is responsible and mature beyond his years, Dylan expects his parents to solve his problems for him.

George/Crashpad – George is one of Jared’s classmates and Dylan’s neighbor. Jared meets George after getting drunk at a party and fighting with Dylan. He doesn’t tell George where he lives, so George and his mom take him in for the night. When Jared thanks George for giving him a “crash pad,” George asks Jared to call him Crashpad. Gradually, they become better friends, and Jared is grateful for their easy friendship.

Mr. Wilkinson – Mr. Wilkinson is Dylan’s dad. When Mr. Wilkinson first meets Jared, they argue about Dylan not needing help from someone like Jared. But at the end of the book, Jared runs into Mr. Wilkinson at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and Mr. Wilkinson says how proud he is of Jared for getting help. This inspires Jared to get sober and regain some control over his life.

Ebony Stewart – Ebony is Jared’s classmate and Dylan’s girlfriend. Ebony teams up with Jared to sell marijuana cookies, but when Jared stops baking with her and embarrasses Dylan at a party, Ebony gets vengeful and makes an embarrassing video of him. Jared often gets impatient with Ebony’s gossip and high school drama, which underscores how responsible and mature he is in contrast to his peers.

David – David is one of Jared’s mom’s boyfriends, whom she dates after divorcing Jared’s dad. David is strict with Jared, and when he discovers that Jared is getting poor grades, he breaks his ribs slowly and gets an erection while doing so. In retaliation, Jared’s mom uses a nail gun to nail David’s feet to the floor. After this traumatic incident, Jared and his mom get a restraining order against David.

Mr. Jaks – Mr. Jaks is Jared’s neighbor, Mrs. Jaks’s husband, and Sarah’s grandfather. Mr. Jaks has severe memory problems

and needs help completing basic tasks. When Jared's mom was in jail, Jared stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Jaks. Jared often comes over to help care for Mr. Jaks, illustrating his maturity and sense of responsibility.

Mavis Moody – Mavis is Jared's aunt and Maggie's older sister. Jared doesn't know Mavis exists until he is 16, when his mom tells him that Mavis ran away from home. At the end of the book, Jared's mom reveals that the reason she married Phil is because Mavis thought she couldn't handle raising a baby alone at 16 years old.

Fake Sarah – Fake Sarah is a river otter impersonating Sarah in order to lure Jared into the woods. Fake Sarah criticizes humans for destroying the environment and leads the other river otters to bite off one of Jared's toes. At the end of the book, Jared's mom curses Fake Sarah, and she and the other river otters become ghosts.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Death Threat – Death Threat is one of Jared's mom's boyfriends, whom she dates after David. Death Threat is a drug dealer, and when he runs up some debts with a local biker gang and they threaten him, he abandons Jared's mom and skips town.

Shirley – Shirley is Dylan's stepmother, Phil second wife, and Destiny's mother. She's is a mousy woman whom Jared's dad meets in physical therapy. Jared rarely sees Shirley, but when he does, she is usually drunk.

Ben – Ben is Destiny's son. When Ben is born, Jared helps look after Ben for a weekend. But when Destiny abandons him alone with Ben for hours, Jared refuses to babysit him again.

Mrs. Brantford – Mrs. Brantford is Jared's neighbor. She sells him medical marijuana that he uses to make marijuana cookies.

Blake – Blake is one of Jared's friends in school; they often play games and get high together, along with Kelsey.

Kelsey – Kelsey is one of Jared's friends in school; they often play games and get high together, along with Blake.

Bambam – Bambam is one Jared's classmates; he's Dylan's hockey teammate.

Alex Gunborg – Alex Gunborg is a Goth kid in Jared's class.

Dawn – Dawn is Mrs. Jaks and Mr. Jaks's daughter-in-law.

TERMS

Anthropocene – The Anthropocene is the current geological age—the period during which human activity is the dominant influence on the environment. In *Son of a Trickster*, characters refer to the Anthropocene as the period of human-driven extinction, resulting from humanity's pollution and destruction of the environment.

Halayt – Halayt refers to someone who is a high chief medicine woman or man (who are also sometimes referred to as shamans). In *Son of a Trickster*, **Nana Sophia** is Halayt.

Heiltsuk – The Heiltsuk are an Indigenous people in British Columbia, Canada, primarily concentrated on the island of Bella Bella. In *Son of a Trickster*, **Maggie** and **Anita** are Heiltsuk, and **Jared** is half Heiltsuk.

'Namgis – The 'Namgis are an Indigenous people in British Columbia, Canada, primarily concentrated around Alert Bay on Vancouver Island. In *Son of a Trickster*, **Nana Sophia** and **Phil** are 'Namgis, and **Jared** is half 'Namgis.



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.



DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES, RESPONSIBILITY, AND MATURITY

Jared Martin is a 16-year-old Native boy living in Kitimat, British Columbia, with his emotionally volatile mother Maggie and her drug-dealing boyfriend Richie. Jared's father Phil, meanwhile, lives nearby with his new wife and daughter, but he is disabled from a back injury and addicted to pain medication. As a result of these circumstances, Jared has to take care of his parents and other adults around him both physically and financially, because they are unable to take care of themselves. Alongside this, he deals with typical teenage drama, but Jared often doesn't have the time or energy to be a normal teenager since he has to shoulder adult responsibilities at home. In this way, *Son of a Trickster* illustrates how children from dysfunctional families often have to grow up more quickly than their peers do, because they're forced to take on the responsibilities that adults in their lives fail to carry out.

Though only a teenager, Jared takes up many of his parents' obligations (like paying bills and doing housework), illustrating how their addictions and neglect force Jared to take on the role of a parent. Jared's father is in and out of the hospital because of a recent back injury he sustained at work. Knowing that his father is in debt and that his addiction to pain medication means he doesn't have the presence of mind to file for disability insurance, Jared makes money in secret (by selling cookies with marijuana in them) to cover his father's rent. He thinks that he "[doesn't] want his dad to be homeless," which shows how Jared and his father have reversed roles: after all, parents are typically the ones concerned with providing for their children and keeping them safe and housed. But because Jared's father

is unable to fulfill his responsibilities as the head of the household, Jared (in spite of his young age) is forced to look after his father's well-being and work to support him. Jared also deals with his drug-addicted mother's neglect and irresponsibility. Because his mother and father are not on good terms, when his mother finds out that Jared is supporting his father, she abandons him. Left in his house with no supervision, Jared has to sell the TV to cover their utility bills and go to a food bank in order to feed himself. He also begs the tenants that are living in rooms in their house to stay and help pay the bills. His mother's emotional immaturity and desire for revenge force Jared into the adult role in the family, making sacrifices and taking care of the house in her absence.

Jared also cares for other people around him, demonstrating how the reversed parent/child dynamic in his family makes him more responsible and mature in all aspects of his life. Early in the novel, Jared's 17-year-old stepsister Destiny has a baby, Ben. Knowing how little support Destiny receives, Jared stays over for a weekend to keep her company, and he learns how to hold the baby and change his diaper. One night, however, Destiny disappears after dinner, and Jared must take care of Ben alone. Destiny comes home drunk the next morning, and the difference in her and Jared's behavior provides a contrast between her recklessness and thoughtlessness (perhaps more typical of an average teenager) versus Jared's willingness to take responsibility and be the caretaker that Ben needs. This shows just how deeply Jared has internalized the maturity that his parents have forced him to develop, as he applies his sense of responsibility to other situations as well. Jared also helps his elderly neighbors, the Jakses. Mr. Jaks suffers from memory problems and has difficulty completing simple tasks, while Mrs. Jaks has leukemia. Jared does yard work for them, shaves and bathes Mr. Jaks, and even visits Mr. Jaks in respite (hospice care) when Mrs. Jaks has to travel to Vancouver for extended periods of time to get chemotherapy. Again, though Jared is only a teenager, he shows a mature instinct to care for any adult in his life who needs it. This is a testament to how his dysfunctional family has forced him to mature beyond the level that one might typically expect from a 16-year-old.

Jared is only allowed brief moments of being immature or carefree, and these stand in stark contrast to his adult responsibilities. This further shows how much more he, as someone with a dysfunctional home life, has had to grow up in comparison with his peers with different family situations. One snowy day, Jared plays outside with a few friends, wrapping themselves in plastic wrap and wrestling each other in the snow before throwing themselves down a hill. Jared "laugh[s] his ass off" as he does this (a rare moment of genuine happiness for Jared) before returning to the Jakses' apartment to shovel snow and watch Mr. Jaks. Placing these events so close to each other illustrates that, in other circumstances, Jared might be able to be more carefree or have a more normal teenage

experience—but his maturity and responsibility place a somber burden on him most of the time. Furthermore, during the period when Jared's mother disappears and Jared is caught up in making sure he can eat and pay bills, the book briefly mentions that Jared has a pop quiz in science and French homework due—both of which he fails. Because of Jared's family dysfunction, he doesn't even have time for normal teenage responsibilities, like schoolwork. In this way, the book suggests that kids like Jared, whose parents are absent or otherwise indisposed, aren't able to fulfill their age-appropriate responsibilities as teenagers, because they're forced to juggle their parents' adult responsibilities as well. Overall, *Son of a Trickster* shows how children from broken homes are often forced to mature beyond their years, to the point that they can't be kids at all.



LOVE VS. VIOLENCE

Violence permeates 16-year-old Jared's life in Kitimat, British Columbia: he gets mugged and robbed while he's baking the marijuana cookies that he sells, and several of his mom's boyfriends abuse him. Violence and love are also inextricably linked for Jared in a confusing way, as his mother and his girlfriend, Sarah, both try to express their love for him through violence (his mother uses violence to protect him and teach him how to protect himself, and his girlfriend tries to be violent during sex). Yet because Jared experiences so much violence at the hands of people who do *not* love him, he shies away from violence in any context and instead seeks out affectionate relationships, like with his dog and grandmother. In this way, *Son of a Trickster* shows how when people mix love and violence it can be confusing and emotionally painful, while unconditional love provides the foundation for the healthiest bonds.

Jared's mother uses violence to protect Jared, but his yearning for her affection instead illustrates how mixing love and violence is confusing and insufficient. Jared's mom dates an abusive man named David, who breaks Jared's ribs as punishment for getting bad grades. In response, Jared's mom nails David's feet to the floor with a nail gun and instructs Jared to nail David's arm to prove that he isn't afraid of David—but Jared refuses, disturbed by her actions. He later thanks his mom for saving him, but at the same time, her capacity to hurt someone close to her is upsetting to him. In a series of text messages, Jared's mom writes to him, "Luv ur guts," a text Jared rereads several times. He replies, "Back atcha," and she texts, "Sarcastic lil shit ur lucky I luv u nuf not to murder u in ur sleep." The fact that Jared rereads the first text so many times indicates how much he longs for (and rarely receives) statements of love from his mother. Instead, she often talks to him like she does in the second text, with threats of violence looming. This underscores Jared's desire for a relationship characterized by straightforward affection, not love mixed with violence.

Inevitably, Jared's mom does turn on him when she discovers that he is giving money to his father Phil, who cheated on her. She trashes Jared's **room** and throws a beer can at Jared's head before disappearing for months. When she finally returns, she admits, "I was pissed. You have no idea what it took not to strangle you." Jared replies sarcastically, "That's love." Because his mother uses violence as punishment in addition to love, her love doesn't feel unconditional in the way that a mother's love should be—and it nearly ruins their relationship as a result.

Jared is also uncomfortable when his girlfriend, Sarah, pushes them to try violent sexual acts, further indicating that using violence as an expression of love can harm, not support, a relationship. One day, when Jared and Sarah are making out, she suggests that he could spank her or that she could tie him up, explaining that she's bored of just kissing. Jared is hesitant, revealing that when David broke his ribs, David got an erection as Jared started screaming. This is another example of how violence and affection (or in this case, sexual arousal) can sometimes be mixed in confusing or upsetting ways. Thus, even though Sarah views the violence as a more exciting or intimate avenue to pursue in their relationship, Jared's anxiety indicates that any kind of violence (even within an otherwise loving relationship) can be traumatic. And in this way, violent passion can be emotionally and interpersonally harmful in a way that warm, caring love isn't.

By contrast, Jared's relationships with his paternal grandmother, Nana Sophia, and his dog, Baby Killer, are nonviolent—and they're much healthier and more fulfilling than his more violent relationships. Jared's dog, an old pit bull named Baby Killer, is his best friend. Baby nuzzles him and licks his face, loyally waits for him to come home, and then follows him around everywhere. It's ironic that a pit bull named Baby Killer—a breed and name associated with violence—is ironically one of the gentlest and most affectionate characters in the book, implying that even when violence is in a creature's nature, being violent is not inevitable or necessary to a strong relationship like the one Baby and Jared have. When Jared learns that he has to put Baby down, he sobs as he mourns his beloved dog's death. The fact that he misses Baby so much indicates that her affection was the kind of unconditional, gentle love that Jared needed—and losing it only makes him even more aware of how valuable that love is. Meanwhile, although Nana Sophia lives a few hours from Jared and his mother, she stays in touch with Jared. She often texts him that she loves him, filling the gap that his mom's abuse and neglect leaves in his life. When Jared's mom abandons him for months, he asks his Nana if he can live with her once the school year finishes, and she immediately tells him that she's going to prepare a room for him. This is a symbolic difference between his grandmother and his mother: his mother destroys his room, showing that her love has limits and that her violence can turn on him. Nana Sophia, meanwhile, provides him with a safe space

that reflects the care and stability that their relationship is founded on.

At the end of the book, however, Jared learns that he is not actually Nana Sophia's biological grandson, and she essentially cuts him out of her life. Jared sobs in response to this, thinking, "She'd been the one person who could make the crap seem less crappy." The fact that he is most upset about losing his grandmother over all other people reinforces how crucial unconditional love is to the healthiest and strongest relationships, while relationships that mix love and violence are complicated and emotionally fraught.



ESCAPISM AND CONFRONTING PROBLEMS

Jared is a troubled teen with a host of problems: his mom and her violent boyfriends abuse and neglect him, and he also begins to experience distressing and confusing visions of magical beings. None of the issues that plague him are within his control, and this lack of control over his own life leads him to self-destructive forms of escapism. He tries to numb himself from his practical, everyday problems through alcohol and drugs, and he also tries to avoid the magical beings that plague him by telling himself that he's hallucinating or going crazy. But neither of these strategies work—his drug use only makes him more miserable and less in control of his life, and trying to ignore magic only makes things worse and puts him and his loved ones in greater danger. With this, *Son of a Trickster* suggests that trying to escape from or ignore one's problems isn't effective and often causes more harm in the long run—instead, it's better to confront problems head-on.

Jared, as well as his mom and dad, use drugs and alcohol as a way of numbing themselves from their interpersonal problems—but, in reality, this only makes their problems worse. When Jared's father moves out and his parents get divorced, his mother has to sell most of their things to cover the cost of the house. Around the same time, Jared starts hanging out with some of the rebellious kids in school, "so he [can] lose himself in gaming and stolen booze" as well as get high. Even at a young age, Jared starts to use alcohol as a coping mechanism for some of the hardships in his life. Yet, as a result, he gets into fights, gets sick and vomits, and gets drunk and high so often that he doesn't remember entire days of his life. This suggests that in trying to stave off some of the sadness in his life, he is actually making his life worse—or even wasting it away. Additionally, Jared's mom is a drug addict, and when she becomes angry with Jared, she abandons him and disappears for months to do drugs. In this way, the drugs (which are meant to help his mom escape from her anger at Jared) only put Jared's mother completely out of control and worsen their relationship. Jared's father, meanwhile, experiences a back injury and becomes addicted to his pain medications. As a result, he becomes absent from Jared's life and has to be hospitalized to deal with

his withdrawal, while Jared uses his own money (which he earns by selling marijuana cookies) to get his dad out of debt. As with Jared's mom, Jared's dad's addiction takes complete control of his life, to the detriment of his whole family.

Just as Jared and his loved ones try to escape from their everyday problems, Jared also tries to ignore the frightening magical beings that being appearing to him—but ignoring the magical realm he's tapped into only makes it more dangerous and out of his control. Jared sometimes sees visions of the Trickster raven Wee'git, who says that he is Jared's real father, or prehistoric ape men walking around. But he tries to rationalize these visions by attributing to the drugs he takes. Toward the end of the book, however, talking river otters begin to threaten Jared. When Jared finally tells his mom about his visions and the otters, she admits that magic is real and that she is a witch, and she tries to place protective spells on the house to head them off. However, these actions come too late, and the otters kidnap Jared and bite off his toe, threatening to eat the rest of him. This sequence suggests that if Jared had been more open or willing to confront his problems, it's possible that his mother could have helped him avoid this fate. Simply dismissing magic, on the other hand, has resulted in painful and permanent consequences. After Jared returns from the cave with the river otters, he and his girlfriend Sarah hang out together. When Sarah and Jared have sex, magical fireflies swarm above them and little pieces of their bodies spiral away from their skin. Even though this makes Sarah feel "alive," Jared is terrified and immediately goes home. Because Jared is too afraid to engage with magic or talk to Sarah about his feelings, Sarah cuts herself with a knife to try to recreate the feeling and is placed in psychiatric care. This suggests that although the magic in the novel can be dangerous, trying to escape from it rather than confronting it leads to greater harm. And, in this way, the book implies that avoiding reality (even a magical reality) isn't an effective way of dealing with scary or difficult aspects of life.

At the book's conclusion, Jared is only able to take control of his life and improve himself when he decides to stop running from his problems. Jared begins to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and as a result, he begins to take pride in himself and make an effort in areas of his life that he previously neglected. He starts doing his schoolwork again, and he gets a job at a Dairy Queen so he can make money legally. His positive experience with sobriety suggests that although people often drink take drugs as a way to feel in control of their lives, in reality, substance abuse only pushes people (like his mother) further out of control as they become beholden to their addiction. Jared also comes to terms with the fact that his mom and Sarah are witches, and that Wee'git, and not Phil, is his real father. Even though this is painful for Jared, confronting his problems directly helps him understand his identity and family history more fully, rather than simply brushing off the odd things around him as hallucinations. *Son of a Trickster* doesn't

neatly resolve Jared's problems—by its end, Jared still largely lacks control over his home life, and he's reluctant to actively involve himself in magic. However, the book portrays his sobriety and his progress toward self-acceptance and away from escapism as steps in the right direction.



THE ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN DESTRUCTION

Son of a Trickster takes place in a First Nations community in British Columbia. Interspersed with the main story that centers on Jared and his experiences, there are several chapters that switch to the perspective of an unnamed narrator whose tone is omniscient and ethereal—almost god-like. This narrator relays how First Nations people's spiritual beliefs center on a reverence for the natural world and an understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things. And alongside this, the book warns that people have forgotten their ties to nature and the rest of the universe, and that this arrogant attitude toward the environment could lead to disaster. In this way, *Son of a Trickster* emphasizes that because people have become ignorant of their intrinsic relationship with nature, they are now on a path to destroy it and perhaps even themselves as a result.

The book's unnamed narrator establishes how people have forgotten how connected they are to the natural world. Early in the book, the narrator instructs readers to remember that every living thing in nature used to be a dying star, and that human beings were once "wriggling through the universe as beams of light." This suggests that human beings are made up of the same elements as everything else on the planet, and that we have been connected to every other being since the beginning of time. Yet the narrator also notes that people usually cannot recall these ancient times, suggesting that they have now forgotten their connection to the natural world. The book goes on to say that people are "transitory vessels built from recycled carbon like every other living being on this planet," again emphasizing how humanity is interconnected with nature. More than that, by observing that people are "transitory vessels," the narrator emphasizes that human beings have a role to play in making sure that Earth can continue its life cycles, even though we often think of ourselves as superior to other beings or nature.

Next, the book emphasizes how people are destroying the very environment to which they are deeply connected. The protagonist, Jared, has a mysterious connection to a magical realm, which causes him to encounter strange visions. At one point, he meets "Fake Sarah," a river otter who takes on the shape of his girlfriend, Sarah. Fake Sarah criticizes Jared, explaining, "You're killing the world and you have the nerve to wonder why we hate you," emphasizing that people are responsible for destroying the environment, and as such, magical beings and animals are turning on people in order to

protect the environment. Later in the book, the river otters kidnap Jared and bring him to a cave. They explain that people are taking all the fish, and that “the rivers burn and taste like shit,” so humans are the only thing left to eat. The otters then bite off one of Jared’s toes and burn his flesh, which sends the message that humanity’s destruction of the natural world is so harmful that human beings themselves must be destroyed in order to counter it.

The book then suggests that humanity’s destruction of the environment is so severe that it will lead to a mass extinction event—one that will ultimately destroy human beings as well. At a party Jared attends, a girl who says she is a Selkie (a mythical being that can shapeshift between a seal and a human) says that Earth has reached the “Anthropocene.” This refers to the geological period in which human beings are the dominant influence on climate and the environment, which will inevitably cause mass extinction of both wildlife and humanity itself. This not only reinforces the idea that people are destroying the world, but that as a result, they might cause extinction even for themselves. Another chapter talks about the mass extinction events that wiped out the trilobites (a species of invertebrates) over 252 million years ago. The narrator relays that it happened when the trilobites were “going out for Starbucks before work,” and that they were blindsided by the end of their world, saying, “whoa, man. What the hell?” Attributing human behavior (like going to Starbucks) and speech (“What the hell?”) to the trilobites implies that people could be just as blindsided by a mass extinction even if they don’t stop destroying the environment.

Finally, the book connects this environmentalist message to Native culture when Sarah references Idle No More, a real-life movement started by First Nations people in Canada to fight against environmental degradation. Sarah describes how “Native people are rising up. We’re protesting the omnibus budget bills that are stomping all over the treaties and this oil company called Enbridge.” While many people are ignorant of their connection to nature and continue to pollute the planet, the Idle No More movement emphasizes how those who appreciate their connection to nature—particularly Native people—understand the importance of protecting it. And by referencing a real movement, the book emphasizes that this issue is anything but fictional and suggests that everyone needs to acknowledge their connection to nature and fight against environmental destruction.



JARED’S ROOMS/THE BASEMENT

Jared’s bedrooms—both the one at his mom’s house and the one at his grandmother Nana Sophia’s house—symbolize his relationships with his mom and grandmother. At the beginning of the book, Jared lives in the basement, having suggested that he move there so that his mom could rent out his room to help cover the bills. This reflects how Jared has to take on greater responsibility in his relationship with his mom, as he has to help shoulder the burden of making sure that they can pay the bills. The basement is rather decrepit, and it becomes even more so when Jared’s mom finds out that that he’s been helping his dad, whom she hates. When she discovers this, she punches the wall, breaks Jared’s furniture, and slashes his mattress. This illustrates that his mom can, at any point, become violent with him. If Jared’s room reflects his well-being at home, the ease with which his mom destroys it suggests that she’s poised to endanger that well-being at any moment. Eventually, though, Jared and his mother are able to reconcile somewhat, and he moves up from his basement to a room on the top floor, next to his mother’s bedroom. This change in living situation reflects a shift in their relationship, as she starts to treat him better and care for him more openly.

Nana Sophia, meanwhile, eagerly prepares a room for Jared at her house for him to visit over the summer. She shows him pictures of the nice room that she has set up—a sunlit room that opens onto a deck overlooking a rocky beach. This room symbolizes the warmth and safety of their relationship, in contrast with Jared and his mother’s rocky relationship over the course of the novel.



THE DARTH VADER POSTER

The Darth Vader poster represents Jared’s gradual coming-of-age journey over the course of the book. The poster first appears at Jared’s friends’ house, which is called Powder House. The cardboard cutout of Darth Vader greets people at the door, and the image depicts the *Star Wars* villain holding a skateboard alongside a thought bubble that reads, “POWDER HOUSE RULES.” Thus, in its introduction, the poster represents a playful innocence: first, it depicts a character from the *Star Wars* franchise, whose viewership is largely made up of kids and teenagers. Second, its message suggests a carefree recklessness—freedom from adults and, likewise, adult concerns.

Over time, however, the poster gradually disintegrates, reflecting how Jared is growing up and away from adolescence. After his friends move away, Jared brings the poster back to his **basement** bedroom and hangs it on the ceiling, where the poster develops cobwebs on its feet and begins to peel away from the wall. This reflects how Jared’s adolescence is slowly decaying as well, as he faces adult problems like helping to care



SYMBOLS

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

for his elderly neighbors, paying his dad's rent, and dealing with his mom's abuse and neglect. By the end of the book, Darth Vader vanishes from Jared's basement completely, and he wonders how he missed the poster's disappearance. This suggests that, likewise, Jared has grown up without fully realizing it—a gradual process, but one that becomes finite by the end of the book when Jared demonstrates his own maturity by getting sober, finding a job, and accepting his true identity as Wee'git's son.

reveals that he is in fact Wee'git's son at the end of the book, Nana Sophia *does* react violently toward him and his mother. Up until that point, however, Nana Sophia showers him with affection, and her seemingly unconditional love is one of the few sources of happiness and support in his life. This suggests that relationships characterized by warmth and affection are much stronger and healthier than those that involve violence—even when that violence is portrayed as something done for the sake of love or protection.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage Canada edition of *Son of a Trickster* published in 2018.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝️ Nana Sophia kissed him. “And I love you and I would never hurt you. But if you weren't Philip's and your momma tried to pass you off as his, I'd have slit her throat and left her in a ditch to die like a dog.”

Related Characters: Nana Sophia, Jared Martin (speaker), Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Phil Martin/Jared's Dad, Wee'git/The Voice

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

When Jared is five years old, he spends the night with his Nana Sophia, his paternal grandmother. Sophia reveals to Jared that she did a DNA test on him to make sure that her son Philip, and not the magical trickster figure Wee'git, is Jared's real dad. This exchange between them establishes two ideas: first, how much Jared's grandmother loves him, and second, how love and violence (though seemingly opposite) can be intertwined. Nana Sophia expresses her love for Jared much more openly and affectionately than other characters, kissing him on the head and openly telling him that she loves him. This is the kind of warmth that Jared rarely receives from his mother or father, particularly once he becomes a teenager.

Yet violence is never far away from love in Jared's life, as Nana Sophia makes clear here. Even though she doesn't explicitly threaten Jared, her quick transition from saying that she would never hurt Jared to talking about killing his mother highlights how love can quickly turn to violence. This is an idea that often recurs in Jared's life, as violence often lurks underneath his mother's love for him as well. Additionally, this foreshadows the fact that when Jared

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝️ Think of magic as a tree. The root of supernatural ability is simply the realization that all time exists simultaneously. Humans experience time as a progression of sequential events in much the same way we see the horizon as flat: our reality is shaped by our limitations.

If you blasted off in a rocket and achieved a low, stable orbit, you would see the planet's horizon curving into a sphere. But how, you may be wondering, can you blast yourself out of time? We don't know how to build those machines yet.

Close your eyes. Concentrate on your breath. Remember that you were not always earthbound. Every living creature, every drop of water and every sombre mountain is the by-blow of some bloated, dying star. Deep down, we remember wriggling through the universe as beams of light.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Wee'git/The Voice

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

The second chapter of *Son of a Trickster* is a complete tonal, stylistic, and narrative break from the other chapters, providing exposition about magic and about humans' relationship to the universe and the environment. While most of the chapters are told through Jared's viewpoint, it's not clear who the unnamed narrator of this chapter is—though one interpretation could be that it is told from Wee'git's perspective.

The first two paragraphs of the chapter establish how magic works—that because humans have a limited view of time, they're unable to perform magic. But given the opportunity to “blast [themselves] out of time,” they would be able to achieve these magical abilities. Yet, like the metaphor of needing a rocket to see the true shape of the horizon, the passage suggests that sending oneself out of time is a terrifying and boundary-shattering prospect—one that is

truly dangerous. In this way, the passage implies the threat of magic: that it can send a person on a great adventure, but one from which they may never return. This is one of the reasons that Jared tries so desperately to avoid magic once he becomes aware of it, because these unknown prospects scare him.

Then, the third paragraph of the chapter touches on environmentalism. In suggesting that humans and even inanimate objects are all made of the same materials—and all once traveled as brilliant beams of light—the narrator implies that humans have an ancient connection to every other thing in the universe. However, the passage also makes clear that humans don't always remember this connection, and the book goes on to illustrate how ignoring our connection to nature then leads us to destroy it.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ Baby thumped her tail when his mom came over to squeeze Jared's shoulder. His mom's eyes darted around the room, but she avoided meeting his. Normally, she'd be telling him sixteen was way too old to be acting like a big fucking wuss, but they could hear the vet and the receptionist talking in the front room, so she stayed quiet. She patted her jeans as she walked out. Probably forgot her lighter in the truck.

The world is hard, his mom liked to say. You have to be harder.

Baby licked his cheek.

"Gonna miss you," Jared whispered in her ear.

Baby lifted a leg and farted. Jared laughed, and then it turned into crying that faded into more sniffing.

Related Characters: Jared Martin (speaker), Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Baby Killer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Jared says a final, tearful goodbye to his dog, Baby Killer, while she's being euthanized at the vet. Just before this, however, he recalls his mother's advice to be "harder"—that is, to harden himself to life's challenges rather than allowing himself to show his emotions. These two interactions contrast Jared's mom with Baby Killer.

Baby Killer and Jared provide each other with unconditional love, as evidenced by the way Baby licks Jared's cheek and cheers him up even when she is about to die. His mom, on

the other hand, views it as her job to toughen him up instead. "The world is hard" and "you have to be harder" are constant refrains from Jared's mom, as she tries to make sure that Jared can deal with the world's violence. And yet, ironically, it is often Jared's mom's violence—or the violence of people she brings into his life—that he most often has to deal with. In this way, his mother is the one who makes his world "hard" to cope with, meaning that her advice probably wouldn't be necessary if she treated Jared more like Baby Killer does.

The fact that Jared is crying over his dog's imminent death is not a weakness, as his mom (and perhaps Jared himself) believes it is. Instead, it is an indication of how much Jared values unconditional love in his life because he so rarely gets it from his mother. These are the relationships, or the moments in his relationships, that he values the most. In this way, the book suggests that unconditional love and vulnerability, rather than violence or emotional toughness, are the best foundation for a strong relationship.

☝☝ He looked down. Blood and chunks had turned the front of his jeans red. And of course his homework was blowing down the street and he didn't want to arrive late, get stared at for his dog-splattered jeans and not have his homework done. His mom wrapped him in her arms while the cop asked Richie to describe his other pit bull. She squeezed him until his ribs creaked.

"Richie could be the answer to a lot of our problems," she whispered in his ear. "If you keep your cool and don't take this personally."

He choked on his answer, trying to pull out of her grip.

"I'd kill and die for you, Jelly Bean," she said. "Don't ever forget that."

Related Characters: Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom (speaker), Jared Martin, Richie, David

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

After Jared's mom runs over Richie's dog with her car, she assures Jared that she did this to protect him. Yet, as much as her passionate vow to "kill and die" for Jared is meant to show her affection for him, this statement combines love and violence in a confusing way and even disturbing way for him. It makes sense for Jared to be uncomfortable with displays of violence, particularly because Richie has just

tried to sic his dog on Jared. Moreover, the fact that his mom insists that Jared should forgive Richie and invite him into their lives further complicates the relationship between violence and love. While Jared's mom indicates that she is going to start a relationship with Richie in order to protect Jared, inviting someone into their lives who was willing to hurt him hardly seems like protection.

Jared's fear in response to this decision is palpable, as he "chokes" on his response and desperately tries to pull away from his mother. In this way, while his mother thinks she is expressing love through her actions, in reality she is simply inviting more violence into their lives and making Jared afraid that she might one day turn on him, too. Notably, the fact that Jared's mom squeezes him until his ribs creak foreshadows a flashback to an incident with David, another of Jared's mom's boyfriends, who breaks Jared's ribs. That incident proves that this is not the first time Jared has experienced violence at the hands of his mother's boyfriends. Avoiding Richie and other violent men like him would clearly be better for Jared, as staying away from him means Jared wouldn't have wound up with pieces of the dead dog on his pants, shredded homework, and a new fear of his mother's violent capabilities. In this way, the book establishes Jared's confusion at his mother using violent passion as an expression of love.

Chapter 4 Quotes

●● A raven landed on the sidewalk in front of him, black and ominous. It cocked its head, studying him. Jared liked crows because they were small and goofy, but ravens with their deep croaks and their large size unnerved him.



"FYI," the raven said, "advertisers lie to get you to buy their product. If you coat yourself in Axe body spray, girls aren't going to pull your clothes off. They're going to hold their noses and back away."

Holy crap, Jared thought. I am still way more stoned than I thought.

The raven hopped closer. "So do everyone a favour and stop bathing in it. Okay?"

"Kay," Jared said.

Related Characters: Wee'git/The Voice (speaker), Jared Martin, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Richie, David

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Jared meets a talking raven (later revealed to be the trickster figure Wee'git) for the first time. Jared's thoughts in this moment illustrate his tendency to avoid problems, as well as his willingness to use drugs in order to do so—even though this means giving up control in his life. Jared instinctively fears the raven and seems to sense that it's dangerous, describing it as "unnerving." Yet, rather than trying to confront this danger, Jared finds it easier to simply dismiss the raven as a drug-induced hallucination. And ironically, because the raven is giving him advice on how to handle girls or his mother's abusive ex-boyfriend David, avoiding this magical raven also means avoiding addressing other problems in his life as well.

The fact that Jared is high in this moment (indeed, he's either high or drunk throughout most of the novel) makes it both easier for him not to think about his problems, or for him to dismiss his problems as the product of his drug use. But this desire for escapism only works for so long, and the "ominous" nature of the raven foreshadows that this being will bring nothing but trouble to Jared's life. Jared's avoidance of his problems and unwillingness to accept the magic in his life only ends up making him more of a target for creatures like the magical river otters he encounters later on, demonstrating the negative consequences of avoiding rather than confronting problems.

●● Jared bumped off a couple of trees as he sped down, laughing his ass off as Kelsey tumbled past him. He was declared the loser, and had to spin a plastic cocoon around Blake, who kangaroo-hopped over to Kelsey and jumped up to kick him.

Afterwards, Jared took the bus back to their neighbourhood and helped Mrs. Jaks shovel the snow out of her driveway while Mr. Jaks searched the house for snow tires for the car they'd sold. They had venison pie for supper. She asked him if he could watch Mr. Jaks on Wednesday while she went to a doctor's appointment. She promised to make his favourite, spaghetti with moose meatballs.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Kelsey, Blake, Mr. Jaks, Mrs. Jaks, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Phil Martin/Jared's Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Jared goes from carelessly playing in the snow with his friends to helping his elderly neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Jaks. This captures two different sides of Jared's character: on one hand, he is still clinging to aspects of his childhood innocence, like throwing himself down a hill, play-wrestling his friends, or being made his favorite meal of spaghetti with moose meatballs. Jared rarely laughs, and so this image of him as a carefree teenager is notable, because so many of the other aspects of his life—primarily, his parents' abuse and neglect—have forced him to grow up prematurely and take care of the adults who need his help.

Transitioning immediately to helping the Jaks only makes this contrast starker. Just as Jared takes on the adult role with his father and mother, here he shows the same role reversal between himself and Mr. Jaks. It is Jared who responsibly shovels snow, while Mr. Jaks (who has memory problems) is unable to care for his home or himself properly. The fact that Mrs. Jaks asks Jared to watch her adult husband also indicates Jared's maturity, as even at a young age, he is tasked with watching over someone much older than him. While in other circumstances, Jared might have a more carefree life, his dysfunctional family has forced him to mature far beyond the level of a typical 16-year-old.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ She was going to be so pissed if—when—she found out he was helping out his dad. Jared didn't want to live with his dad. He wasn't picking sides. God, no. He just didn't want his dad to be homeless. He didn't want to worry about her reaction, but it wiggled around the back of his mind like a melody that you hummed without thinking.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Phil Martin/Jared's Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

As Jared returns from visiting his dad in the hospital, he texts his mom and lies about where he is. In this passage, Jared's thoughts reveal several of the major conflicts in his life: first, they show how much responsibility he's had to take on as a result of his dysfunctional family. Because of his back injury and subsequent addiction to painkillers, Jared's dad is unable to work, so Jared feels obligated to support him financially. He is only able to earn enough by selling marijuana cookies, which is illegal and dangerous. In essence, Jared and his father have switched roles: whereas

one might typically expect a father to be concerned with his son's safety and well-being, here Jared is the one who is sacrificing his own well-being to support his father despite his young age. In this sense, Jared is forced to take on adult-like responsibilities because his dad is unable to fulfill his responsibility as a parent or take care of himself.

Moreover, Jared's anxiety about his mom finding out that he is helping his father reveals the tension underlying his relationship with her. That she could be angry with him simply for wanting to make sure that his dad has a place to live illustrates that her love for Jared is constantly in danger of turning hateful and even violent. Jared seems to feel that this is inevitable, as he notes how angry she'll be "when" (not if) she finds out. And indeed, when she does find out, her reaction does turn violent much like Jared predicted. This unease colors not only his relationship with her but also his general well-being. The simile of his worry "wigg[ing] around the back of his mind like a melody" suggests that Jared can't shake off the ever-present threat of violence in his life. In this way, his mother's violence detracts from his relationship with her and from his happiness as a whole.

Chapter 9 Quotes



☝☝ *The money is for YOU, she wrote. I mean it. Destiny's having her baby soon.*

My pretty, pretty enabler. Repeat after me: I'm not responsible for the crappy decisions of the grown-ups in my life.

Jared rolled his eyes. Love you, Nana.

Love you more, Cutie.

Related Characters: Nana Sophia, Jared Martin (speaker), Destiny, Phil Martin/Jared's Dad, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Christmas, Nana Sophia deposits money into Jared's bank account as a gift. This text message exchange between Jared and Nana Sophia encapsulates both Jared's responsibility and the loving relationship between the two of them. First, Nana Sophia highlights how much Jared takes care of the other people in his life, so much so that she acknowledges how he won't use the money she gives him for himself and even calls him an "enabler." This speaks to how responsible and caring Jared's character is despite his young age, as he always uses what little money he has to


support his family. Nana Sophia tells Jared that he should be responsible for the “crappy decisions” of the grown-ups in his life—and it is exactly those crappy decisions that have led him to have to be responsible, because no one else in his family is.

Additionally, Jared and Nana Sophia’s text illustrates the kind of loving, affectionate relationship they have. Jared rarely texts his mother with this kind of sentiment, and when he does, she often bites back by making fun of him or assuming that he is being sarcastic. But the fact that Nana Sophia returns his feelings shows the strength of a relationship that’s built on gentle, warm love rather than intimidation. Consequently, Jared finds security in his relationship with his grandmother and the ability to express his own feelings in return. Thus, this exchange speaks to the idea that relationships based on this kind of love are healthier and more valuable than those underpinned by violence or mockery.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☹️ The trilobites were blindsided by the end of their world. They were like, whoa, man. What the hell? What did we ever do to you? But no one answered and they had nowhere to hide. Nowhere was safe. Every last trilobite died. Their bodies were covered with mud and ash. As the eons passed, they were pressed into fossil that would, one day, make lovely bookends and paperweights.

Mass extinction sucks.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter—which, like Chapter 2, represents a shift in tone and narrator—discusses the Permian-Triassic extinction event, which wiped out all of the trilobites (insect-like invertebrates) along with 9 out of 10 other species, approximately 252 million years ago. While the narrator is describing this event, the language anthropomorphizes the trilobites: the fact that they say “whoa, man” and “what the hell?” makes clear that the trilobites are a stand-in for humans. Because the novel has already mentioned the Anthropocene—the geological period the Earth is currently in, where humans are driving environmental destruction and species extinction—this description only becomes more clearly about humans rather than trilobites.

Connecting trilobites to people in this way suggests that human beings are headed for their own destruction, and they, too, will have nowhere to hide and no one who can answer for this destruction except themselves, covered in mud and ash. The passage suggests that human beings aren’t all that important in the grand scheme of Earth’s history—people, too, will one day end up as fossils, perhaps admired by some even more advanced species the way humans admire the trilobites now. But this passage reminds people (including readers) that if they want to avoid this mass extinction, it is their obligation to protect the environment in order to do so.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☹️ Dylan threw up and Jared went to the kitchen and made coffee.

He sat at the island and turned on his phone again.

Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, Destiny had texted.

I hate my life, Jared thought.

He checked his voice mail, erasing Destiny’s messages as soon as he heard her voice. One of the messages began with a long pause.

“Jared?” Mrs. Jaks said. “I’m home. I need some help.”

She’d phoned two days ago. After the holiday parties, he couldn’t really remember what he was doing two days ago.

Related Characters: Mrs. Jaks (speaker), Jared Martin, Dylan Wilkinson, Destiny

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Over his Christmas break from school, Jared attends many different holiday parties. One morning, he wakes up in a hungover stupor in an unknown house. As he gets his bearings and tries to unravel what he’s been doing over the last few days, this passage illustrates the two conflicting halves of Jared’s personality. On the one hand, Jared is responsible: he helps care for his elderly neighbor Mrs. Jaks as much as he’s able, prevents Dylan from beating up George unnecessarily, and makes coffee for Dylan while he is experiencing a hangover.

And yet, there is also a part of Jared that longs to escape this responsibility, as he went to a holiday party and got so drunk that he’s unable to account for several days of his life. Alcohol provides an outlet through which Jared can escape

from his problems and responsibilities. He turns off his brain just as literally as he turns off his phone here, allowing himself to shirk off the responsibility of caring for Mrs. Jaks or feeling guilty about his stepsister Destiny for a while.

In this way, the book illustrates how alcohol becomes an avenue of escapism for Jared. But because Jared still “hates his life” when he surfaces from his drinking—because he still has to face these numerous problems once he sobers up—the book suggests that the best way to take control of one’s life is not through escapism but by confronting those problems directly.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞☞ *U home 2nite?* his mom texted.

Yup.

Luv ur guts.

She was probably drunk and lonely but he read it and reread it, swallowing. *Back atcha.*

Sarcastic lil shit ur lucky I luv u nuff not to murder u in ur sleep.

Ya, ya.

Get ur rotten ass home b4 I hunt u down.

I have pizza.

Best son ever.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Maggie Moody/Jared’s Mom (speaker), Phil Martin/Jared’s Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

After Jared discovers that his dad is taking advantage of the money he’s been bringing him, he texts his mom while he’s on the bus home. This exchange illustrates how their relationship blends together love and violence, often in a confusing way, and it speaks to Jared’s desire to simply have unconditional love. First, Jared’s response to his mom’s text, “*Luv ur guts*,” is telling. Rereading it over and over again suggests that Jared both values and rarely receives affectionate texts like this from his mother. His acknowledgement that his mother is probably drunk and lonely also illustrates that under normal circumstances, she might not be this affectionate.

But because Jared’s mom so quickly deviates from this affection to joking about murdering him in his sleep or hunting his “rotten ass” down illustrates that there’s a

constant threat of violence underneath her affection, which unsettles Jared. And because he has seen how quickly his mom can turn on others in her life, the idea of his mom hunting him down isn’t merely a joke—it could quickly turn into a very real threat as well. This inability to fully separate love from danger is what makes Jared’s relationship with his mother so confusing and painful at times. This fraught dynamic reinforces the book’s argument that the strongest and healthiest relationships are those characterized by gentle, unconditional love rather than violent passion.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞☞ “Are you going to the Idle No More walk?”

“The what?”

“Seriously? Do you live under a rock? It’s all over the news.”

“Kinda busy lately.”

“Wow. Just...wow. Dude, Native people are rising up. We’re protesting the omnibus budget bills that are stomping all over the treaties and this oil company called Enbridge—”


“Oh, that.”

“Oh, that?”

“It’s pretty much a done deal,” Jared said. “The environmental review is a dog-and-pony show to shut everyone up.”

“Way to bend over.”

Related Characters: Sarah Jaks, Jared Martin (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

When Sarah starts attending Jared’s school, she asks if he wants to join her at the Idle No More walk. Their exchange touches on the book’s environmentalist message, connecting it in particular to Jared and Sarah’s First Nations identity.

Throughout the book, the unnamed narrator has provided exposition on how Native people’s spiritual beliefs center on a connection to and a reverence for the natural world. The difference in Sarah and Jared’s attitudes in this passage shines a light on their differing degrees of connection to their Native identity. Sarah is very interested in “decolonizing” different aspects of her life—her diet or her language, for example—meaning that she is trying to reject social norms that derive from the way Europeans’ colonization of Canada has influenced the nation’s culture.


Jared, on the other hand, has little connection to his Native identity. This seems to be why the environmental issues that are important to Sarah are so easy for Jared to dismiss, which further suggests that, for First Nations people, meaningfully connecting with their heritage also involves caring about humanity's impact on the environment.

In addition, Robinson uses this passage to connect her book to the real-life Idle No More movement, a campaign started by Canadian First Nations activists to restore rights and sovereignty to Native people and to stop environmental destruction. By referencing a real movement, the book implies that this issue is anything but fictional—protecting the environment is a crucial responsibility that people bear in real life as well.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☛ Our bodies are transitory vessels built from recycled carbon like every other living being on this planet. Bits and parts of you have probably been a cricket or a dinosaur or a single blade of grass on the prairies.

With all the power of technology and science in the world, I would bet you dollars to doughnuts that you still trust a human face to be a human. But come closer and let me speak to the creatures that swim in your ancient oceans, the old ones that sing to you in your dreams. Encoded memories so frayed you think they're extinct, but they wait, coiled and unblinking, in your blood and your bones.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 158-159

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter, which is written from the perspective of the unnamed narrator, explains how all living things are biologically similar, specifically touching on how human beings are connected both to one another and to nature. By describing people's bodies as "transitory vessels," the narrator implies that human beings have a role to play in continuing Earth's life cycle—that we are a part of ensuring that the planet will continue to exist. This is in contrast with how we often think of our own species, as most people believe that they are superior to beings like crickets or blades of grass. This attitude of superiority can lead people to treat other living things carelessly, and to perpetuate the environmental destruction that the book warns against. In reality, the narrator emphasizes, humans evolved from the very beings that they tend to view as inferior, and so they are deeply connected to them.

In the second paragraph, the narrator emphasizes how, despite our technological progress and our perspective that focuses on the future, it is just as important to appreciate the past. Underneath every human face, the narrator suggests, lies a history and a memory of extinct creatures that continue to live on in "your blood and your bones." The fact that these memories are active—waiting "coiled and unblinking"—suggests that they are still important and still have a role to play in our lives, just as nature does.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☛ Science had a pop quiz. French had homework due he hadn't done. At lunch, he ate a stale croissant with no-name margarine that he'd scored from the food bank. Spring had sprung. The grass needed cutting, the fridge was making noises and he had no idea how he was going to make the bills. He thought that was probably part of the punishment. If he was going to pay his dad's bills, then he was going to pay his mom's. She had a Biblical sense of justice. Eye for an eye, bill for a bill.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Phil Martin/Jared's Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Five weeks after Jared's mom abandons him in their house, Jared has gone completely broke, as he's had to pay their bills and keep up the house. This passage demonstrates Jared's immense responsibility, contrasted with his mother's immaturity. First, the passage centers on Jared's maturity as he's obligated to maintain the household in his mother's absence. However, the passage begins by mentioning the homework Jared hasn't done, which speaks to how trivial normal teenage concerns like homework seem in comparison Jared's dire circumstances as he struggles to sustain himself. Additionally, Jared is concerned about mowing his lawn and fixing his fridge—responsibilities that are more typical of parents than teenagers.

By contrast, Jared's mother has completely forgone any responsibilities and is demonstrating her own immaturity. She is so angry at Jared for trying to help his father that she is taking out her anger toward Jared's father on her son instead. While she claims that she loves him, her impulsivity clearly overtakes her in these weeks. She treats Jared as though she is a petulant child asking a parent for fair

treatment in paying her bills as well as his dad's, abandoning her responsibility to ensure that her son has a safe home to live in and food to eat. Additionally, the book once again associates Jared's mother with violence in referencing the Biblical verse "an eye for an eye," which is drawn from Leviticus 24:19-21. This verse is usually used to reference harsh punishments, and it's often followed by the idea that an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind. In other words, the book suggests that those who have been wounded should be benevolent rather than reacting with the violent outrage like Jared's mom does.

☝ He took her hand and put it on his ribs. "My mom dated this douche named David. He didn't like my grades, so he broke a couple of my ribs. Slowly. He got a boner when I started screaming."


Sarah flinched. "That's messed up."

After a bit she kissed him, then took her hand back and reached up for the j. She inhaled deep before she curled into his side.

"I feel numb," she said, "all the time, like I took sleeping pills and can't wake up. I just want to feel something."

"I don't want to hurt you," Jared said. "And I don't want to be hurt."

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Sarah Jaks (speaker), David, Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 163-164

Explanation and Analysis

One day, when Sarah and Jared are hanging out alone in his house, Sarah asks him to slap her or to let her tie him up while they have sex. In response, Jared provides more backstory on what happened between him and his mom's ex-boyfriend David: David beat Jared up and got an erection while doing so. This incident illustrates why Jared has a difficult time with mixing love and violence.

Connecting violence with sexual arousal is emotionally painful for Jared, because he associates this with an extremely traumatic memory. While Sarah recognizes this pain, she views controlled violence during sex as something potentially exciting and intimate to explore in their relationship. Jared, on the other hand, implies that he'd prefer straightforward affection to avoid any further trauma. In this way, the book thus portrays warm, loving relationships as far healthier and more positive than those

based on violent passion.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝ "Are you still helping him?"

"No."

"Then why'd you pawn the TV?"


"You took off, but we still had bills."


She took another deep, slow breath. "I was pissed. You have no idea what it took not to strangle you."

"Yeah," Jared said. "That's love."

She side-eyed him. "That's the only thing that kept you from being mulch."

Related Characters: Maggie Moody/Jared's Mom, Jared Martin (speaker), Phil Martin/Jared's Dad

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Jared's mom abandons him in their house for weeks, as punishment for Jared helping out his father. Here, she returns home and finally confronts Jared about what he did. This exchange between them reveals both Jared's mom's immaturity and the pain of mixing violence into a relationship that is meant to be loving. First, her question of why Jared pawned the TV—assuming that Jared is still helping his father—shows her irresponsibility. In reality, Jared sold the TV out of desperation to scrimp money and pay the bills that his mother left him with. So, while Jared's mom seems to view selling the TV as another betrayal, in reality, the unstable environment she's created for Jared forces him to take on the adult responsibility of earning money.

Second, Jared's mom's acknowledgement that it took all she had not to strangle Jared for helping his dad rings hollow. After all, she threw a beer can at Jared's head before she left. She also completely destroyed his room, depriving him of a safe, comfortable environment. Jared's sarcastic statement that not strangling him is "love" underscores the idea that healthy, loving relationships don't usually entail this kind of abuse. While Jared's mom sometimes uses violence to show affection (for instance, as a way of defending Jared from other people), the fact that she also uses it as punishment means that her love doesn't feel

unconditional to Jared. In this way, the book illustrates that violence in relationships can undermines love.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☛ His younger brother wanted nothing to do with magic or magical creatures. He was in love with a woman who wanted high status and a strong warrior for a husband. His village was at war and he wanted to fight. He didn't want his father's lonely life. His father was regarded with suspicion, resentment and hatred by everyone, even his own clan, who all blamed the shaman when someone fell sick. His son saw the fasting, and the time alone in the wilderness, and the lack of friends and decided that being a shaman wasn't for him. But the spirits flocked to him like mosquitoes, torturing him until he gave in and became a powerful, powerful shaman.

Related Characters: Jwa'sins (speaker), Jared Martin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

When Jared meets Jwa'sins in the pizza parlor—before he fully understands who she is—she tells him a story about a shaman's two sons. While the older son in the story wants to follow in his father's footsteps and learn how to use magic, the younger son tries to avoid magic altogether. This story is symbolic of Jared's own journey in the novel, as he gradually confronts the magic in his life. At first, Jared also wants nothing to do with his supernatural abilities or with the magical creatures who appear to him—he can't even fully admit to himself that magic exists. Later in this meeting with Jwa'sins, he even confirms that he doesn't believe in magic or spirits.

However, just as the spirits "tortur[e]" the shaman's younger son when he tries to ignore them, Jared's refusal to accept magic doesn't prevent supernatural beings and events from interfering in his life. Throughout the novel, his interactions with supernatural beings illustrate how spirits are clinging to him even as he denies that they are real. The fact that Jwa'sins emphasizes how the spirits hurt the shaman's son also foreshadows that Jared, too, will be plagued by violent spirits like the river otters, who will cause him physical harm. The end of Jwa'sins story illustrates that only by acknowledging those spirits and engaging with magic is the shaman able to confront the problems plaguing him and gain control over his life. Similarly, the story implies that Jared can only do the same when he acknowledges magic and confronts it directly.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☛ "Give me the knife."

"Not while you're wasted. No cutting." He wiped her blood off his face, tasting salt. His hand came away red.

"No cutting," Sarah agreed.

Jared let her go. She traced his face with her fingertip.

"Blood," she said.

"Your blood."

"You're mine. Now and forever."

"Awesome," Jared said. He wished people could make undying declarations of love and loyalty to him when they weren't half-cut or stoned out of their gourds. Or sorry.

Related Characters: Sarah Jaks, Jared Martin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 212-213

Explanation and Analysis

When Sarah gets high on magic mushrooms, some of the cuts on her body inexplicably open up, and she places her bloody palm on Jared's head. This scene is another example of Jared's discomfort with mixing violence and love. Sarah tries to turn her cuts into a kind of expression of love by marking Jared with her blood, similar to a blood pact or a sacrifice. Yet Jared has already expressed his dislike for violence in their sexual relationship, and he is equally upset here, suggesting that mixing violence into their relationship is emotionally painful and confusing for him.

Jared yearns for people to express their love for him when they're not "half-cut" (slang for drunk) or "stoned out of their gourd" (high on drugs) or "sorry" (only affectionate because they're guilty). Jared would rather have a simple, pure expression of love than the violent passion that Sarah expresses here.

This passage also ties Sarah's drug use and her self-abuse (her cuts are self-inflicted) to her desire for escapism. She has trouble engaging with her magical abilities and feeling alive, and both the self-harm and the drug use represent her attempt to escape the dullness of her everyday life. But, eventually, mixing drugs and violence has dire consequences for Sarah: at one point, she cuts herself while under the influence, and she hurts herself so badly that she's hospitalized for her injuries. With this, the book implies that it is better to confront problems head-on rather than trying to find a path to escape them.

Chapter 30 Quotes


☞ The ape man leaned on his knuckles, sniffing the air. His head swung back and forth. He bent down and sniffed the floor. Jared lifted his feet onto the couch. There goes the neighbour's house. Off to Kansas.


[...]

Other hands scabbled through the floor, their nails clicking on the linoleum.

I'm here, Jared thought. Alone in the living room. I'm watching TV. Nothing else is real. I know the difference between real and not, and this isn't real.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Sarah Jaks

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

After Jared and Sarah have visions of being in a prehistoric time and seeing strange “ape men,” Jared returns home and tries to maintain his hold on reality—a prospect that grows more difficult when more ape men start crawling through his basement while Jared is watching TV in the living room. Here, the book demonstrates how Jared tries to avoid confronting magic directly, pretending that he doesn't see the ape men. He tries to convince himself over and over that he's not seeing them, even as he modifies his actions (like lifting his feet) to avoid them. The fact that this action is immediately followed by more ape men coming up from the basement illustrates that simply ignoring one's problems doesn't make them go away—it's necessary to confront problems directly to regain control of one's life.

Meanwhile, Jared is watching a show on the Weather Channel about tornadoes, and he also references Kansas—together, these are subtle references to *The Wizard of Oz*. In this movie, a tornado whisks Dorothy's house away from her hometown in Kansas to the magical land of Oz. This reference indicates a turning point for Jared, just as the tornado was a turning point for Dorothy. Try as he might, Jared can't deny the magical elements that are infiltrating his life—he now sees the ape men, Sarah's magical fireflies, and other supernatural beings everywhere he goes. And much like Dorothy, who tries desperately to return to Kansas, Jared is trying to regain a sense of normalcy amid these magical elements, even though his perception of the world will be forever changed.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☞ “You loved your dog because you were her master,” Fake Sarah said.

“What?”

“You only love the ones that crawl to you and beg for food.”


“Hey, I didn't do anything to you.”

“Human,” she said. “We're dying because you're killing us.”

“I'm not killing anyone.”

“You're killing the world and you have the nerve to wonder why we hate you.”

Related Characters: Fake Sarah, Jared Martin (speaker), Baby Killer, Sarah Jaks

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Fake Sarah—a river otter who has shapeshifted to look like Sarah—confronts Jared about his love for his dog and about humanity's impact on the world. This expands the book's commentary on how people are affecting the environment. In telling Jared that the river otters and the world are dying because of humans—despite Jared's protests that he hasn't done anything wrong—the book implies that all human beings are complicit in the environmental devastation that is occurring around the world.

Throughout the book, the unnamed narrator has interjected the main story with lessons about how Jared's First Nations culture centers on a reverence for and a connection to nature—and this passage also emphasizes how Native people are particularly apt to convey this message. Because of Jared's magical abilities derived from his Indigenous Heiltsuk and 'Namgis culture, he is one of the only people who can absorb Fake Sarah's message. This emphasizes the importance of Native people in conveying that message and fighting against environmental destruction.

Furthermore, even though Fake Sarah criticizes Jared and Baby Killer's relationship, saying that it was one of dog and master, this is a misunderstanding of the love that they shared. Jared loved Baby Killer in particular, which Fake Sarah understands because she used Baby Killer's image to lure Jared out of his house. Baby Killer is so important to Jared not because he could control her, but because she loved him unconditionally in return—again illustrating how valuable unconditional love is.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ Jared swallowed. He needed to get them off topic. What would get them off topic? “Anthropocene.”

Fake Sarah nodded as the others murmured. “The world is burning.”

“Humans take all the fish,” another one said.

“Can’t stay in the river,” another spat, “The rivers burn and taste like shit.”

“Soon the only thing left to eat,” Fake Sarah said, “is you.”

“I’m sorry,” Jared said.

“We don’t want you sorry,” Fake Sarah said. “We want you dead.”

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Fake Sarah (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis


After Fake Sarah and the other river otters have bitten off one of Jared’s toes, Jared tries to stall and prevent them from eating him by bringing up the Anthropocene (the current geological age in which human beings are the drivers of the next mass extinction event). This is the second time that this period has been mentioned directly (in Chapter 6, a girl who claimed she was a Selkie, a mythological human/seal creature, told Jared that they were in the Anthropocene). The recurrence of the Anthropocene emphasizes how human beings are driving the current extinction period, and the river otters believe that this is because of the way people are polluting the planet.

However, despite the fact that Jared is First Nations (Heiltsuk and ‘Namgis) and has a connection to both the magical and natural worlds, he doesn’t fully understand the river otters’ message. His ignorance indicates how even people from cultures that revere nature can still wave off environmental destruction. But, as the river otters suggest, being ignorant or apologetic for the world’s destruction isn’t enough—all people are complicit in it, and so they all bear some responsibility. In criticizing and attacking Jared, biting off one of his toes, the river otters suggest that human beings may even need to be destroyed in order to protect the world, if humanity continues on its destructive path. In this way, the book highlights how important it is for people to take responsibility for environmental degradation and to stop this destruction.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ All he seemed to be doing these days was crying. Why stop now, he thought, as he bent over and put his head on the table. He didn’t care if Nana—if Sophia killed him. She’d been his lifeline when things got dark. She’d been the one person who could make the crap seem less crappy. And she hated him now. And he hated himself and his life, and he heard himself choking on his own snot and he was disgusted but he couldn’t stop.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Nana Sophia, Wee’git/The Voice, Phil Martin/Jared’s Dad, Maggie Moody/Jared’s Mom

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

When Jared tells Nana Sophia that he is actually Wee’git’s son and not Phil’s, Nana Sophia essentially disowns him. As a result, Jared breaks down in tears. Just before this, Jared had already lost a great deal amid his encounter with magical river otters: his sense of reality, his sense of identity, a toe that the otters bit off. But the thing that most upsets him is losing Nana Sophia, to the point that he now hates his life. This demonstrates how crucial Nana Sophia’s love is to him, because she was always the one who gave it unconditionally, who supported him without any hint of violence or betrayal like his father and mother. His emphasis that she is the “one person” who could make his life feel better confirms the idea that her love is unique in his life; she made him feel safer and happier than anyone else. In this way, the book reaffirms Jared’s need for that unconditional love, and how that unconditional love was the foundation for his healthiest relationship.

Of course, this is also what makes the loss so traumatic for Jared. Nana Sophia’s love *becomes* conditional here, contingent on the fact that Jared is her biological grandson. Without that blood relation, a monster beneath her skin threatens Jared, and she looks murderously at him. In effect, she turns on him just as violently as his mother has, and that violence undermines their entire relationship and Jared’s happiness as a whole.

Chapter 37 Quotes

☛ He heard the fireflies coming with her down the hallway, and he didn't want to see them. He willed them away, but they wouldn't go.

"Come back," Sarah said. "I can't hear them if you aren't there."

"No," Jared said.

"I've never felt anything like that."

"You're coming apart," Jared said. "It's taking you apart."

"We're joining."

"No, you're shredding."

"I'm not scared."

"I am."

Related Characters: Sarah Jaks, Jared Martin (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis



Before Sarah leaves the neighborhood with her grandparents, she and Jared have sex one final time. As this happens, their bodies start to shred away. In this moment, Jared recognizes the danger in the magical world—but again, rather than trying to confront his fear directly, he tries to avoid it at all costs. He simply wants the magic to disappear from his life, as indicated by the fact that he is trying to “will” the fireflies away. Yet even Jared realizes how futile this is, as he knows that for all his wishing, he can't simply make the fireflies go away.

Soon after this exchange, Jared leaves the house, too afraid to return to Sarah. It's notable, however, that Sarah has a different understanding of what is happening: she believes that they're joining and experiencing something positive, not something negative. But because Jared refuses to talk to her about the magic or engage with it at all, he has no way of understanding it better—he is too consumed by fear. As a result, Sarah takes steps to try and revive this feeling herself: she later takes magic mushrooms and ends up cutting herself so badly that she winds up in the hospital—both from her injuries and to get psychiatric treatment. As such, the book illustrates that avoiding problems—as Jared does with magic in this moment—can have dangerous and severe consequences, both for Jared and for those he loves.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☛ The bites had healed. He didn't feel his missing toe anymore. He should be over it by now, he thought, but as he treaded water, he wanted to get drunk, immediately. He wanted to not feel terrified or dumped or used anymore. He wanted to get out of his head and never, ever crawl back in.

Related Characters: Jared Martin, Nana Sophia, Sarah Jaks, Dylan Wilkinson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis



After Jared loses a toe, Nana Sophia essentially disowns him, and Sarah is hospitalized, he goes down to the nearby lake, and Dylan throws him off the pier. As Jared treads water, he again expresses a desire to use alcohol to escape all of the horrible things in his life. The idea that Jared wants to get out of his head implies that his escapism is less about avoiding physical pain and more about escaping from the mental anguish he's been experiencing. And the fact that he doesn't want to “crawl” back in only reinforces how much pain his problems have caused him, to the point that he feels physically diminished and dejected because of what has happened to him.

This again returns to the central tension of Jared's character. He has faced a great deal of hardship and responsibility throughout his life, and especially in the past few weeks—a part of him (his toe) has even been literally lost. So, alcohol represents a way for him to escape those responsibilities and the problems that have made him so mature, if only briefly. He wants to avoid the pain of what he's experienced and to get to be a kid jumping off a pier at a lake. Thus, even at this late stage, Jared hasn't fully recognized the need to confront his problems rather than avoid them. However, by the end of this chapter—on the very same day, no less—Jared will resolve to give up alcohol. This shows that he knows how harmful this kind of thinking actually is, and that simply drinking his life away will not actually help him feel better about himself.

“I want to shake your hand,” Mr. Wilkinson said. And he held out his hand, and he was attracting attention, so Jared reluctantly shook. “It took a lot of guts to come here. I wish I’d been as together as you are when I was your age. I’m proud of you, Jared.”

Jared started crying. Leaking tears. And then bawling and shaking. And feeling like a phony and a loser. Mr. Wilkinson wrapped his arms around him and let him cry.

Related Characters: Mr. Wilkinson (speaker), Jared Martin, Jwa’sins, Dylan Wilkinson, Maggie Moody/Jared’s Mom, Phil Martin/Jared’s Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

When Jwa’sins takes Jared to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, Jared is amazed to find people who aren’t trying to pretend that they’re doing better than they are. This is a turning point for Jared, as he realizes how much he feels like a “phony” and a “loser” for getting drunk all the time and pretending to be okay. In this way, admitting how much pain he’s in is a key step to confronting his problems, because he is finally trying to avoid the escapism he’s resorted to throughout his life. As Mr. Wilkinson acknowledges, Jared is brave to address his problems rather than avoiding them, particularly because substance abuse often causes more problems than it solves for Jared. The book thus illustrates that confronting one’s problems (in Jared’s case, getting sober) rather than resorting to escapism is a key step to regaining control over one’s life.

Additionally, this passage acknowledges how, once again, Jared is responsible beyond his years, because he is intent on taking steps to get better rather than simply continuing to throw his life away like many of his peers (including Mr. Wilkinson’s son, Dylan) do. Jared has already observed the horrible outcomes of addiction in his mother and father, which has forced him to become self-sufficient—and this maturity is reflected in Jared’s decision to seek help. But in this moment, having an adult to help reinforce Jared’s decision is also crucial, because it gives Jared the safety and support that his own family fails to provide him. Here, Mr. Wilkinson eases Jared of some of his responsibility, allowing him to be a vulnerable kid who needs—and receives—support.

Chapter 40 Quotes

“Judge-y and self-righteous, just like my mom.”

“I’m not judging you. I love you.”

“You want me to quit drinking now, right? Stop partying. Be a good fucking girl and keep your legs fucking shut and obey everybody. Right?”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with you. This is my sobriety.”

“Can you stop quoting your cult?”

“You don’t have to change,” Jared said. “You don’t—”

She whacked him upside the head.

“Later,” Jared said.

Related Characters: Maggie Moody/Jared’s Mom, Jared Martin (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 313-314

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the book, Jared starts going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and gets sober. In this exchange with his mom, Jared illustrates how this represents a major step toward regaining control over his life—and it once again proves how Jared’s maturity surpasses his mother’s. Not only is Jared able to do his homework and get a job with the extra time he has (rather than losing days of his life to drinking and recovering from hangovers), but he is also able to take control of his interactions with his mother. He is able to calmly communicate that he loves her, but he’s also able to remove himself from the situation rather than endure her abuse.

By contrast, his mother views Jared’s choices for his own life as a judgment of her lifestyle as a heavy drinker and drug user. This lifestyle has a detrimental effect on Jared’s mother’s behavior: she essentially throws a tantrum, shoving Jared and hitting him on the head when he doesn’t agree with her. Even though Jared’s mother loves him, her substance abuse exacerbates her violent tendencies and prevents her from being able to express that love. His mother’s dysfunction and immaturity have caused Jared to grow up faster and take on the maturity that she does not have. Their relationship is thus complicated and arguably unhealthy, because his mom’s violent actions undermine the care that Jared needs.

This exchange also demonstrates that confronting one’s problems directly—as Jared does by getting sober—is the only way to regain agency in one’s life. Jared is able to find control and empowerment in his sobriety, while his mother

is unable to do so.



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

Jared's maternal grandmother, Anita Moody, has never liked him. Once, when Jared was growing up and his parents left the two of them alone, she called Jared "Wee'git" and warned that if he hurt his mom, Anita would kill him. Anita was always cuddly with Jared's cousins, but the last birthday present she ever gave Jared was a jar of blood with animal teeth in it. Jared's mom said that she would beat her mom up for the way she treated Jared, but Jared's dad assured him that this wasn't about Jared.

Jared flashes back to when he is five years old, when his mom and dad decide to move to Kitimat. As they finish packing, Anita arrives and stands in front of the moving truck. She warns that Jared is a dangerous Trickster wearing a human face, and Jared's mom curses at Anita before getting back in the truck and driving off. The family then drives to the ferry, where Jared and his dad go up to the deck and wave goodbye to their old home.

After getting off the ferry, Jared and his parents go to visit his mom's friends, who live nearby. Jared plays tag outside with their kids until most of them disperse, except for one girl named Becky who insists she and Jared have to play, just the two of them. When Jared tries to protest, Becky says that she'll tell on him, and he curses at her. Moping, Jared goes and locks himself in the moving truck. A short while later, his parents come out and explain that he won't get dessert for a week for cursing Becky out. They tell him to apologize to Becky—though his dad acknowledges that they haven't been setting the best example regarding bad language.

Jared and his parents then go to his paternal grandmother's house, where she lives with her fourth husband, Jim-Bob. Jared is shy to greet Nana Sophia, but she hugs him warmly and kisses his forehead. She tells Jared's mom and dad to have a fun night out and leave Jared with her for the night. They agree, but they warn Nana Sophia that Jared can't have dessert. Nana Sophia makes Jared hot cocoa instead, claiming that it's a drink and not a dessert.

Right away, this passage hints that Jared's family is somewhat dysfunctional. His mom expresses her love for him by threatening to hurt her own mother; from the very outset, Jared's mom's love and violence are deeply intertwined in a way that is confusing to Jared. Meanwhile, Anita giving Jared a present with blood and animal teeth foreshadows the witchcraft and magic woven throughout the story.



Again, Jared's mother indicates that the way she expresses her love for Jared is through a fierce protectiveness that borders on violence. But the way she treats Anita suggests that this violence could easily be turned on any family member, including Jared. In addition, Anita foreshadows Jared's connection to magic, and the book establishes that the people in Jared's life often deal with the issue of magic by avoiding it entirely.



Jared's interactions with the other children demonstrate that even at a young age, his family dysfunction is already affecting how he interacts with others. Jared knows mature language and isn't afraid to use it, but this exchange suggests that he may not have many interactions with other young children or know the codes of conduct to use with them. In addition, he has the wherewithal at five years old to be self-sufficient, returning to the moving truck when he doesn't know where his parents are. This demonstrates how Jared's family situation has forced him to be much more mature than he might have been otherwise.



In contrast to Jared's mother, the book establishes Nana Sophia as very kind and warm. While Jared's mom isn't afraid to curse and punish him, Nana Sophia is affectionate and playfully skirts the rules out of care for her grandson. This sets up their relationship as a foil (opposite) to Jared's relationship with his parents—it's built on love and support rather than violence and conflict.



After Jared's mom and dad leave, Nana Sophia suggests that they go to a movie, even though Jared protests that he's not supposed to play outside after nine p.m. She puts a sewing mannequin under her bedcovers with a wig on it so that it will look like she and Jared are asleep if his parents return early, and then they take her Vespa to a nearby movie theater to watch *Spider Man*. She buys Jared a huge bucket of popcorn, grabs a booster seat, and places her fur cape on the seat for him to sit on.

As the movie starts, Jared tells Nana Sophia that Anita thinks he's related to Wee'git. Nana Sophia assures Jared that she had a DNA test done on him when he was born: he's part 'Namgis, part Heiltsuk, and not a Trickster. Nana Sophia tells Jared that she loves him and that she would never hurt him—but if he wasn't Phil's son, she would slit Jared's mom's throat.

After the visit, Jared writes to Anita that Nana Sophia did a test, and that Phil is his dad—he isn't a Trickster. A few weeks later, he receives a letter in response: Anita explains that Sophia is a Halayt and would know if he were a Trickster without a scientific test. Still, she tells Jared to be careful if Wee'git visits him. She apologizes for being angry with him but explains that she can't tell him their family's full history because he's too young to hear it.

CHAPTER 2

The root of supernatural ability is the realization that all time exists simultaneously. Most human beings do not have magic because they have a limited view of time, in the same way they see the horizon as flat when in reality it is curved. The narrator instructs, "remember that you were not always earthbound," explaining that every living creature, every drop of water and mountain, was once a star or a beam of light, and that people can remember this.

The details of Nana Sophia and Jared's trip to the movie illustrates Nana's deep affection for her grandson. She makes sure to take care of him before herself, spoiling him by letting him stay up past his bedtime, buying him popcorn, and making sure he's comfortable on the booster seat. Gestures like this establish their relationship as a healthy and supportive one, with kindness and affection (as opposed to violent threats) bolstering it.



Even though Nana Sophia demonstrates that she loves Jared unconditionally, she, too, shows a hint of violence underlying her caring persona. This threat suggests that for many of the book's characters, violence is always lurking underneath affection, which makes it difficult for Jared to know who truly loves him. As a young child, it likely confuses him when people mix love and violence in this way.



Anita foreshadows some of the danger that Wee'git will bring into Jared's life. But because she doesn't educate Jared about their full family history, nor does Jared even understand what Halayt or magic means in this context, he pushes it to the side. This conversation hints that magic is dangerous, however, which means that pushing it away and trying to forget about it may only invite more danger into a person's life.



This passage suggests that humans are interconnected with the natural world and with the rest of the universe, because every living creature and every drop of water were once beams of light or parts of stars. But in saying that humans have to "remember" this, the book implies that humans have forgotten that they are connected to things that are larger than themselves.



CHAPTER 3

In the present, Jared has to take his pit bull, Baby Killer, to be euthanized, because she has heartworm. He and his mom bring Baby to the vet in the morning to sedate her. Jared scratches her head, and when she wheezes, his eyes water—until she licks his arm. Jared leans his head against Baby's, and the vet gives them a moment. As Jared cries with his dog, his mom goes out for a smoke. He knows that if the vet wasn't there, his mom would be telling him not to act like a "wuss." Jared tells Baby that he's going to miss her and hugs her hard.

The story flashes back to when Jared got Baby Killer a few years earlier. At the time, his mom is dating a guy named Death Threat, but he leaves suddenly because he owes debts to a violent biker gang. One guy from the gang expects Jared's mom to pay the debts, and he pins a note to their door with a knife asking for the money. Jared's mom dismisses the note, saying sarcastically that someone laid a monster hex on them.

Jared's mom is struggling: following her and his dad's divorce, many of Jared's mom's friends moved away when the paper mill, Eurocan, shut down. Now, she has trouble making the mortgage, and the fridge is only full of scraps from her job at the North Star. She watches Jared constantly, and he surmises that she's worried about the biker gang.

The morning that Jared's mom discovers the knife, Jared walks to the bus stop and sees a tall man in a leather jacket watching him with two pit bulls with him on chains. The man releases the pit bulls, and Jared drops his backpack to run away. Suddenly, however, Jared's mom comes down the road and hits the pit bull with her car, squashing it under her tire. Blood sprays the snow. Jared's mom tells the man to leave Jared alone, that their business should remain between the two of them. As they hear a police siren getting louder, she apologizes coolly for hitting his dog, but the man says that he has another. When a policeman approaches, the two of them put on a show, lying that it was an accident as though they'd been practicing for years.

Here, the book contrasts Jared's relationships with his dog and with his mother. Jared and his dog share a gentle, unconditional love as he quietly cries over losing her, and she seems to comfort him in return. Jared's mom, however, makes no effort to sympathize with him, and Jared suggests that she would discourage his emotions by calling him a "wuss" if they were alone. By placing these two relationships so close to one another, the book illustrates how much healthier Jared's affectionate relationship is with his dog than with his mother, who associates love and emotion with weakness.



Jared's flashback underscores how violence has always been a constant presence in his life because of the people that his mom dates. The fact that her boyfriend is nicknamed "Death Threat" immediately establishes that she's attracted to violent men, perhaps because she believes that they can protect her. But this association with love and violence does not translate to Jared, who only experiences the violence that her boyfriends bring into his life. Additionally, Jared's mom's aside that the biker laid a "monster hex" on them further hints that she's involved in magic.



Jared's mom's struggles further contribute to his family's dysfunctional dynamic. Rather than worrying about age-appropriate problems for a teenager (like schoolwork or friendships), Jared has to worry about his mom's financial woes, as well as her violent boyfriends.



This incident is the first overtly violent act that Jared's mom commits in the book, and it illustrates why mixing love and violence can be confusing for Jared. His mom is clearly trying to protect him, but squashing a dog underneath her car tires is a gruesome action that probably doesn't come across as a loving gesture to Jared. His mom quickly aligns herself with the man following the incident, complicating the idea of who might be an enemy in Jared's life and who might be a friend. This shows that, in some relationships, violence and love are not always mutually exclusive.



After the cop leaves, Jared realizes that his jeans are splattered with blood and dog chunks, and that his homework has flown out of his backpack. Jared's mom tells him that the man, Richie, could answer a lot of their problems if Jared keeps his cool. Jared tries to pull away from her, but she grabs him and says that she would "kill and die" for him.

Back in the present, Jared runs on the track during gym class. It's raining and almost freezing outside, but he insists on running to train for the track team while the other kids do basketball drills. In reality, he just doesn't want to explain his swollen eyes to them. When Richie moved in, his other dog—Baby Killer—immediately became attached to Jared. She crawled into his bed at night, nuzzling him and licking his face. She'd wait for him to come home from school every day and then follow him around the house.

As Jared stretches just outside the gym doors, Dylan Wilkinson approaches him. He's Native, like Jared, but he lives on the nearby reserve, Kitamaat Village, and hangs around with the sporty crowd. Dylan asks if Jared is selling cookies, but Jared denies it, saying that his mom's boyfriend Richie is the one who sells. Jared says that the only cookies he makes are for the track team's bake sales. Dylan glares at him, annoyed that Jared won't sell to him. Dylan leaves, and the end-of-day buzzer blares. Not ready to go back to the vet, Jared lets the rain hit his face until he's numb. He doesn't want to "blubber like a dumb-ass again."

After putting Baby Killer down, Jared and his mom sit in his room in the **basement**, drinking a six-pack of beer. Jared lives in the basement so that his mom can rent out his upstairs bedroom, along with two other rooms, to cover their bills. They dragged his mattress down, along with a toaster oven, a hot plate, and tote bags to hold his clothes. He also has a utility tub, a toilet, and a door that leads outside with its own lock. Richie put up a wall to separate Jared's side of the basement from the laundry machines. With his paper route money, Jared also bought a mini fridge and a couch—but the basement is still damp, dingy, and cold.

While Jared's mom believes that saying she would "kill and die" for him is an expression of her love, this statement is more complicated for Jared. His attempt to pull away from his mother suggests that he's troubled by what his mother has done, and by her willingness to invite a violent person into their lives for the sake of protection. In this way, mixing violence and love can be confusing and frightening.



Here, the book establishes the love between Jared and Richie's other pit bull, Baby Killer. It's ironic that a pit bull named Baby Killer—a breed and a name both associated with violence—turns out to be the most loving relationship in Jared's life. This suggests that even though violence is ever-present in Jared's life, violence in one's relationships is not inevitable.



Dylan's inquiry hints at the fact that the cookies Jared sells aren't typical bake sale fare—they likely contain with marijuana. This introduces the fact that drugs also have a constant presence in Jared's life, and one that many kids in school use to escape their problems. Additionally, Jared's final thought here shows how his mother's mockery of genuine emotions influences the way he thinks about himself. Rather than recognizing that it's natural to mourn a beloved relationship, he seems to view his love for Baby Killer and sadness over her death as a sign of weakness or stupidity (this is why he refers to himself a "blubber[ing] like a dumb-ass").



Jared's move from his bedroom upstairs to the basement reflects his relationship with his mother and his maturity. Even though he is only 16, Jared is taking on adult concerns like worrying about paying bills because his mom can't do it alone, illustrating how those who grow up in dysfunctional households are often forced to grow up more quickly than they would otherwise. In addition, the basement affords him adult independence—his lifestyle is more similar to that of an adult living in an apartment than a teenager living with his mother.



Jared's mom suggests that he spend the night upstairs with her, but Jared refuses, knowing that Richie would be annoyed at being made to sleep on the couch. They finish the six-pack and take shots of vodka before Richie drives them out to a logging road. Jared digs a grave and puts a blanket down, laying Baby on top of it. He's pretty sure that he's crying, but later, his mom tells Jared that he was singing "Like a G6."

This passage establishes another key part of Jared's life: the fact that he uses alcohol to cope with his many problems. Even at 16, he drinks beers and does shots of vodka (encouraged by his mother) to dull the pain of his dog's death, illustrating how alcohol is a means of escapism. But it's also a coping mechanism that comes with consequences, as it distorts Jared's sense of reality.



CHAPTER 4

One morning, a week after putting Baby down, Jared considers not getting up—but he talks himself into putting his clothes on and brushing his teeth. He goes upstairs to get cereal, where two of the tenants are watching news in the living room. His mom appears and tackles him, sending his cereal flying as she insists that he fight back. Jared refuses, and she kisses him like a toddler. Richie then appears in the doorway, scowling, while the tenants laugh. He complains that Jared was eating his cereal, and now it's on the floor, but Jared's mom retorts that Richie won't eat anything if he doesn't shut up. Jared comments, "Mom, total overshare," and Richie gives him a death glare. Jared knows that if they were alone, Richie would beat him up.

Again, the book shows how love and violence mix in Jared's relationship with his mother, as she tackles and kisses him in the same instant. This seems to be her way of trying to toughen Jared up as a way to protect him, but his reaction to her implies that he would much rather have an uncomplicated, loving relationship than one tinged with violence. Moreover, Jared acknowledges how she has brought even more violence into his life with Richie, whom he suspects would beat him up for wasting Richie's cereal if his mother weren't around. In this way, even though his mom views violence as a way to protect Jared, he struggles to view it this way.



Some days after school, Jared's elderly neighbors, the Jakses, pay him for some yard work and give him some food. Mrs. Jaks is Native from the northern part of British Columbia, and Mr. Jaks is Czech. On this day, Jared rakes their leaves and mows their lawn, helping Mrs. Jaks wrap her rose bushes in burlap before the frost gets too bad and dig up the potatoes and carrots. While they work, Mr. Jaks comes outside in his pajamas and asks for the car keys so he can go to work. Mrs. Jaks points out that they sold the car, and that Mr. Jaks is retired.

Jared's interactions with the Jakses show how his maturity and responsibility extend beyond his own household. Because his dynamic with his mom is so dysfunctional, Jared has learned to be self-sufficient and reliable for those around him, and this extends to helping out his elderly neighbors.



Jared then goes inside to get dinner, which he's grateful for because he's starving. At dinner, Mr. Jaks asks who Jared is in Czech, and Mrs. Jaks reassures him that Jared is a good kid. After dinner, they have blueberry dumplings, and Jared helps Mrs. Jaks do the dishes. Mrs. Jaks tells Jared that she wishes he knew Mr. Jaks before he got sick. Then, they all watch *Wheel of Fortune* together, and the Jakses both start to nod off. Jared is comfortable and is tempted to sleep there, but he says goodnight and locks the door behind him.

The Jakses provide an idyllic picture of what Jared's home life might be like with a more stable living situation. But this only provides a brief respite from his typical days, as Jared has to be the responsible one in his household to make up for his mother's failings. In this sense, Jared has been deprived of his normal teenage experience because of the responsibility that his mother's irresponsibility forces him to take on.



On Friday after school, Jared takes the bus to meet his friends Kelsey and Blake. They get high, douse themselves in Axe body spray, and play video games together at Kelsey's house. After losing at Halo 3 against strangers online, Jared says that he has the munchies and goes off on a junk food run. He walks to the mall nearby, noticing a raven flying overhead as it snows lightly.

Jared likes hanging out with Kelsey, but Kelsey flunked out of most of his subjects, so they don't have classes together. Blake was also close to being expelled, because he is a pyromaniac and set a dumpster fire in a construction site. Last year, Blake's dad was also caught embezzling, and they lost their house and car. Whenever his dad got too angry, Blake slept at Jared's. Sometimes, Blake and Kelsey make fun of Jared for being a nerd. Jared does get average grades, particularly because Nana Sophia gives him money for good grades. He keeps the money secret because his mom doesn't like Nana Sophia—his mom believes that his dad's family should be cut out of their lives.

At the mall, Jared is grabbing some snacks when he bumps into his mom's ex-boyfriend, David. Jared's heart starts thumping, and he reminds David that they have a restraining order against him. David dares him to call the cops, smelling the marijuana on Jared, but Jared threatens to call his mom. David points out that Jared is still hiding behind his mommy and then walks away. Jared goes to the bathroom and stays there until the mall closes, worried that David might come back. He then gets on the bus, scanning to see if David is tailing him, and gets off at the stop near his house.

As Jared walks home, a raven lands on the sidewalk in front of him, unnerving him. The raven speaks to him, telling him to stop dousing himself in Axe body spray and not to worry about David—David knows that if he touches Jared again, Jared's mom will skin him alive. Jared thinks that he must be more stoned than he thought. The raven also tells Jared to keep this conversation to himself, as the raven has enemies and doesn't want Jared to be more of a target than he already is. Jared thinks that the marijuana must have been laced with LSD, and that it's been a weird day.

At his friends' house, Jared is able to escape some of the responsibilities he has at home—both through smoking weed and by allowing himself to do normal teenage activities like play video games with friends. This demonstrates how Jared uses these activities as forms of escapism, perhaps more so than his friends do. Additionally, the raven alludes to the trickster figure Wee'git, who often appears as a raven in Indigenous mythology.



Jared's friends' experiences suggest that violence and hardship permeate many of the teenagers' lives in Kitimat, not just Jared's. While violence is sometimes portrayed as an expression of love, this makes many of the teenagers' relationships with their abusive parents confusing. Even here, Jared's mom's anger toward Nana Sophia and Jared's dad's family ends up cutting him off from more people who love him, suggesting that violent relationships can be especially harmful when they stand in the way of healthier ones.



Jared's threatening run-in with his mom's ex-boyfriend David hints that they had some sort of violent conflict in the past. The restraining order—coupled with David's statement that Jared is still hiding behind his mom—suggests that David was violent toward Jared, and that Jared needed his mom to protect him. Jared's panicked reaction is a reminder that violence can be traumatic, particularly when perpetrated by someone who's close to one's family.



Here, the talking raven's appearance again alludes to the trickster figure Wee'git, who appears as a raven in Haisla mythology. But Jared's dismissal of the raven as a drug-induced hallucination suggests that he's using drugs as an excuse to avoid confronting the problems in his life. In this case, he's trying to deny the possibility that he might not actually be imagining the raven.



When Jared's mom brought David home for the first time, she told Jared to be on his best behavior. Though his mom was very excited to be dating David, Jared didn't like him at all—David's smile never reached his eyes when talking to Jared. When he knelt down to show Jared how he could balance a baseball on his fingertips, Jared flinched away from him. And David only pretended to like Jared, "until the bitter, bitter end."

Jared spends Saturday afternoon at Kelsey's in the backyard. They play Sumo Worm, wrapping themselves in a roll of plastic wrap and wrestling each other in the snow. After that, they throw themselves down the hill in the yard, still wrapped in plastic, and Jared laughs wildly. Afterward, he takes the bus back to his neighborhood and helps Mrs. Jaks shovel the driveway. He also agrees to watch Mr. Jaks on Wednesday while she goes to a doctor's appointment.

When Jared gets home, he joins the tenants for a beer, joking around until Richie comes home and grabs the beer out of his hand, saying, "Thanks, Useless." Suddenly, the ground shudders, and hanging pots clang—an earthquake hits. When the house stops shaking, Richie tries to call Jared's mom, but Jared says biting that she's not worried about Richie. Richie tells Jared that he needs a beating the next day.

That evening, Jared's mom comes down into the **basement** while Jared is playing video games. She kisses the top of his head before pulling him into a headlock, telling him that he should text her back after an earthquake. She then says that someone asked Richie if he could put in a good word with Jared to get marijuana cookies. Jared admits that he's been baking a batch every now and then, and his mom says that he could get jumped for doing that, and Richie is pissed. She says that her performing oral sex on Richie is the only thing saving Jared from landing in the emergency room. Jared replies that he didn't need to know that, and his mom insists that Jared start carrying a weapon to protect himself.

The book's reference to "the bitter, bitter end" again foreshadows a traumatic incident between Jared and David. This adds a dimension to Jared and his mom's relationship, as even though she tries to protect him with her violence, she also brings violence into Jared's life by dating David (as well as Death Threat and Richie). In this way, the book demonstrates that mixing love and violence can be stressful and emotionally painful.



The contrast between Jared's carefree nature when he's playing with his friends and his responsibilities at the Jakses' emphasizes his maturity in comparison with his friends. Jared is rarely able to play like a normal teenager, the way he does here. Instead, he must shoulder the burden of his trouble home life as well as care for his elderly neighbors. This demonstrates how the responsibility Jared has been forced to take on because of his mother's dysfunction also extends to other aspects of his life.



Although the earthquake is a passing incident, it alludes to the way Jared's life is soon to be shaken up by magical beings like the talking raven. In addition, Jared's interactions with Richie again illustrate how the people closest to Jared often act violently toward him, and his mom facilitates this violence in his life by stay in relationships with violent men.



Again, Jared's mom mixes affection with violence as she both pulls Jared into a headlock and kisses him. But as a result of this dynamic, Jared feels constantly on-edge and threatened by the people in his life, including his mother. Alongside this, violence and love are tied up in Jared's mom's relationships in a complicated way too. Even though she is theoretically dating Richie to help protect herself and Jared, the fact that she often has to protect Jared from Richie suggests that conflating violence with love in this way does more harm than good.



After Jared's mom leaves, Jared grabs a beer from the fridge to get the image of his mom and Richie out of his head. He misses Baby Killer, knowing that normally when he felt down, she would put her head in his lap and look up at him. Jared gets another beer before bed as he hears the tenants partying upstairs. Then, Jared notices light from the laundry room coming through a small hole in the wall, and he sees the light disappear and another hole open up. When he gets up and peeks through the hole, the laundry room is empty. The next day, Jared patches the holes and doesn't tell anyone what happened. He's upset, though, that someone has been spying on him, and he thinks that people are basically good until they think they can get away with something.

This incident provides more evidence for the fact that Jared uses alcohol to escape. He drinks to avoid the image of his mom and Richie having sex, but also to avoid the reality that someone he lives with might abuse him. Additionally, he contrasts Richie and his mom's violence with the affection that he is deeply missing from Baby Killer, showing how important and how much healthier unconditional love is for a teenager like Jared. Lastly, Jared's discovery of the holes in the laundry room wall is another example of how he tries to avoid his problems rather than confronting them directly, as he refuses to tell anyone about this.



CHAPTER 5

On Facebook, Nana Sophia posts pictures of herself on the cruise ship where she's spending her honeymoon. Jared notices that she's online and starts chatting with her. She asks Jared to spend Christmas with her, but he knows that his mom would see this as a betrayal. She asks if Jared can stay with his dad, and Jared says that his dad is fresh off Oxycodone and that his stepdaughter just got pregnant and is staying with him. Nana Sophia also tells Jared that he should show Richie respect, otherwise Richie will continue to be a problem for him. She says that she's moving back to Canada in the spring, and that Jared can stay with her if he likes. He thanks her, and she signs off, "Sweet dreams, Cutie."

Nana Sophia's genuine concern and care for Jared is a stark contrast to the way other adults in his life treat him. The fact that she is openly affectionate toward him and tries to help him with his problems makes this the healthiest and most stable relationship Jared has. In addition, Jared's exchange with Nana Sophia also highlights some of his family's issues (such as drug addiction and teen pregnancy), which have caused him to deal with mature problems even at a young age.



CHAPTER 6

At the track team bake sale on Halloween, Jared mans the toaster oven to help bake the cookies, which he uses as a cover for when kids outside his circle ask him for marijuana cookies—he simply tells them that he bakes for the track team. One Goth kid, Alex Gunborg, approaches Jared and asks if he has any *other* cookies, but Jared plays dumb and says that they only have chocolate chip or a vegan option. Alex leaves, disappointed.

Jared often uses drugs as a form of escapism, and it seems that the other kids at his school do too. Jared sells drugs in the form of cookies baked with marijuana, and there seems to be a high demand for them, which suggests that drug use is a systemic problem in Jared's community.



After the bake sale, Jared watches Mr. Jaks while Mrs. Jaks is at the doctor as promised. Jared helps maintain some of the lawn equipment before helping Mr. Jaks bathe. They then sit in the kitchen and are drinking tea together when Mrs. Jaks comes back with a pre-cooked rotisserie chicken before disappearing inside her bedroom. Mrs. Jaks hates buying pre-cooked meals, so Jared knows she got bad news at the doctor.

This passage again illustrates how much responsibility Jared takes for Mr. and Mrs. Jaks despite his young age. In showing how Jared watches Mr. Jaks and helps keep up their house, the book underscores Jared's mature instinct to care for the adults in his life, which likely results from the responsibility he has to take with his own parents.



Every Wednesday after school, Jared delivers the *Northern Sentinel*, and near the end of his paper route is Mrs. Brantford's house. Her son grows medicinal marijuana and regularly gives her some for her glaucoma. When Jared was 14, he delivered a vaporizer that Death Threat sold her, and Jared showed her how to work it; they got high together in her living room. Today, she invites Jared in for a cup of cocoa—a signal they share that she has marijuana to sell him. She gives him the drugs, and they chat about her bad luck at the slot machines.

After finishing his route, Jared takes the bus to a nearby pizza place. The cook knows his mom from her party days, so she sometimes gives Jared the single slices that she would normally throw out. After a slice, Jared heads to a friend's house in the neighborhood to bake cookies with the marijuana that Mrs. Brantford gave him. The house, which everyone calls Powder House, is unlocked. A cardboard figure of **Darth Vader** with a snowboard and a thought bubble saying "POWDER HOUSE RULES" hangs on the door. Amid the posters and futons and blow-up furniture, only one blond guy is passed out on a beanbag chair—no one else is home.

Jared washes the bowls and pots before grabbing ingredients from the kitchen. He usually gives the residents free cookies for their use of the kitchen, and they usually buy the rest of his cookies fresh. Jared is amazed that they can keep their jobs with the amount they smoke. He shakes the marijuana into a bowl and starts melting the butter when he hears the front door open. As he turns to see who it is, someone whacks him with a frying pan on the side of the head.

When Jared wakes up, the smoke alarm is blaring, and the kitchen reeks of burned butter. Jared rolls over and vomits up the pizza he ate. The blond guy curses at Jared and tells him to burn down his own place. Jared looks down: his jacket, shoes, wallet, and cell phone are missing, as is the marijuana. His inner voice tells him that it could be worse—he's breathing, at least. Jared starts to get up, but he sways. The blond guy makes him clean up his vomit, but Jared just gets nauseous again and throws up in the sink.

Jared's mom's boyfriends have been involved in drug-dealing—and, in Death Threat's case, even involved Jared in that business. And other adults in his life, like Mrs. Brantford, condone and participate in this behavior rather than trying to protect Jared. This is another aspect of Jared's life that's forced him to grow up: even from age 14, he was familiar with marijuana vaporizers. And now, at 16, he essentially runs his own business selling marijuana cookies and feels comfortable doing drugs with the adults he knows. In this way, the recklessness and illegal activity of the adults in Jared's life have caused him to grow up quickly.



Darth Vader marks the entrance of Jared's friends' house, and the cardboard poster is a symbol of childhood innocence and freedom in several ways. First, the character is from Star Wars, a sci-fi franchise that a kid like Jared would have grown up with. Second, his "POWDER HOUSE RULES" sign exhibits a teenage exuberance in having a place independent from adults. In this way, the Darth Vader poster symbolizes the carefree nature of adolescence—a lightheartedness that Jared seems to yearn for and tries to escape to whenever he can.



This incident establishes one of the reasons that it's so hard for Jared to view violence as a part of a loving relationship. He also experiences violence outside of the context of those relationships, like when he gets hit in the head here, so it's difficult for him to see violence in the same way that his mother does.



Jared's marijuana cookie baking is not a simple or safe business: it is a risky endeavor, and not one that most kids his age would take on. Jared, however, needs the money because his parents aren't able to provide for him. He's witnessed his mom's boyfriends' drug-dealing, which seems to have influenced him to start dealing as well. In this way, the adults in his life have led him to put himself at risk and to take on more financial responsibility than is perhaps fair.



At that moment, some of Jared’s friends get back to the house. Jared tells them that someone hit him in the kitchen, but he doesn’t know who did it. One guy, Kyle, says that they have marijuana and demands that Jared make cookies, but Jared wants to go home. Another guy, Saul, tells Kyle to go easy—Jared is just a kid. Saul tells Jared that they all got fired from their jobs after they got drug tested, and they’re a little bummed out.

Jared makes the guys a batch of cookies, which they give him money for even though it’s their marijuana, and then they phone their friends for one last blowout. Jared sips a beer as the guys eat the cookies and the party starts. Saul gives him a muscle relaxer pill, and Jared washes it down with beer before going to lay down in Saul’s bedroom. Jared considers calling his mom, but he knows that she and Richie would just end up joining the party, and he’d still be stuck here.

Just then, a pretty girl with blue hair enters the room asking if he’s the “Cookie Dude.” Jared sits up on the bed and introduces himself, and she says her name is Murchadh. She says that she likes the magic in his baking, and that she senses loss in him. As she sits next to him on the bed, Jared explains that his dog died. Murchadh says that they’re all going to die soon—they’ve entered the Anthropocene, the human-driven extinction event.

Murchadh kisses Jared, and when she pulls away, her lips sparkle. She says that her mother was a Selkie, and she asks what he is—but he only responds that he’s high. As Murchadh starts unbuttoning his shirt, she says that Jared has the moon in his eyes, and that she comes from the ocean.

CHAPTER 7

Jared catches the 6 a.m. bus to visit his dad in Terrace. After sleeping on the bus for 45 minutes, he gets off at Walmart before walking the seven blocks to his father’s apartment. His stepsister Destiny lets him in, her belly bulging under her Minnie Mouse sweatshirt. Destiny gives him coffee, and Jared can hear his dad’s wife, Shirley, in the bedroom singing along to AC/DC.

Jared is so mature and experiences so many adult situations (like dealing drugs or getting mugged) that even his friends forget that he’s “just a kid.” This reinforces his dysfunctional home life has made him more mature than other teens his age, to the point that even his peers treat him like an adult.



Here, Jared again uses alcohol to escape the pain of being hit in the head, while his friends use alcohol and marijuana to avoid facing the fact that they were fired from their jobs (for smoking pot, no less). In addition, this passage again illustrates how the adults in his life have forced him to become more responsible than his mom or Richie. Rather than taking care of him and bringing him home after he was assaulted, Jared suggests that they would simply join in the teenage party.



In referencing the Anthropocene, Murchadh expands on the unnamed narrator’s environmentalist sentiments from Chapter 2. In this real-life period, human impact is the driving force for environmental changes, showing how human destruction of the environment is dangerous and could potentially lead to a mass extinction event. With this, the book highlights the need to respect and care for the natural world.



In Norse and Celtic mythology, a Selkie is a creature that can shapeshift from seal to human form. Murchadh thus represents a connection between humans and nature, making it apt for her to spread a warning about humanity’s destruction of the environment.



This trip to visit his dad, which Jared takes alone, at 6 a.m. on a weekend, again highlights how responsible Jared is and how much he cares about his family. In addition, this passage’s initial characterization of Destiny is notable: even though she is pregnant and soon to carry parental responsibilities, she is wearing a Minnie Mouse sweatshirt. This underscores how Destiny is still very young (and perhaps immature) and likely unprepared for this kind of responsibility.



Destiny tells Jared that his dad is back in the hospital—the medications he takes for his back pain aren't working. Jared asks why she didn't text him, and Destiny shrugs. Jared says that he'll do another sell in a week or so and get them caught up on rent. Jared also asks if the insurance people got back to his dad about his disability claim, or if they got the paperwork. Destiny doesn't know, and Jared thinks that Destiny seems like a five-year-old. She goes to get the insurance papers as Jared sips the coffee. The coffee is watery, and Jared realizes that they're probably rationing it. He wishes he'd stopped at Walmart to grab a tin of Folgers before he arrived.

Jared and Destiny bring some of the rent money to the landlord's office before heading to Walmart to buy groceries. Back at home, Destiny makes Jared lunch and tea, and Jared briefly glimpses Shirley, who smells like alcohol. When he met her for the first time, he was surprised that such a mousy woman could have broken up his parents' marriage. Jared then heads to the hospital to visit his dad, who's shaking as the nurse gives him Suboxone. After she leaves, his dad says that he'd go back on Oxycodone in a heartbeat if he could afford it.

Jared's dad asks how his mom is, and Jared says that she's the same. "Life with a witch," his dad comments. Then, before drifting off to sleep, he makes Jared promise to get a desk job so that he won't crack his back. Jared knows that his dad's disability check is small, and his dad wants to sell the house that Jared and his mom live in. He doesn't think they can keep up the mortgage and the bills, but his mom wants to fight for it.

When Jared's dad met Shirley in physical therapy, he started acting like his old self. He was protective of her, and after his and Jared's mom's divorce was finalized, they'd immediately moved in together. Nana Sophia didn't attend their wedding, and she and her son stopped talking soon after, as his dad criticized her for getting her money by marrying wealthier men. Jared's mom hated his dad because he ran off with Shirley and left her saddled with the mortgage. She spent their wedding day cursing him and burning every photo of him that she could find.

Again, in spite of his young age, Jared has been forced to take on the role of a parent—even more so than Destiny, who is actually going to be a parent soon. Jared worries about his dad's well-being, the rent (which is the reason that he sells the marijuana cookies), his dad's disability insurance, and even making sure that his family has coffee. These are all things that a parent would normally handle, but because his dad is unable to fulfill his responsibilities as head of the household, Jared takes on the parental role instead. This illustrates how children from dysfunctional families tend to grow up quickly and take on more responsibility than is perhaps appropriate or fair for their age.



Jared helps take care of Destiny by helping her buy groceries and go to the landlord's office to pay the rent, again illustrating just how deeply Jared has internalized his sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, his dad's addiction to pain medication (indicated by the Suboxone, which doctors use to ease patients' withdrawal from opioids) has left him unable to care for his family.



While his parents bicker about the house, Jared worries about his father's health and making sure that both of his parents can pay their bills. Again, this demonstrates how Jared has swapped roles with his parents, which speaks to how children growing up in dysfunctional families learn to take on extra responsibilities when their parents cannot. In addition, Jared's dad's addiction to pain pills shows how dangerous and destructive using drugs as a form of escapism can be.



The dysfunction in Jared's family seems to go beyond his parents, as his dad and grandmother have a fraught relationship as well. None of the adults in his family are willing to maturely confront their issues, though, so Jared is stuck in the middle as he tries to figure out how to maintain relationships with the three most important adults in his life. This has forced him to grow up quickly, juggling his connections with Nana Sophia, his mom, and his dad, all while keeping these relationships largely secret.



After the ordeal with David, Jared's dad visited him in the hospital and offered to take Jared in, but they both knew Jared's mom would never let this happen, as she had sole custody. So, Jared stayed with Mrs. Jaks while his mom was in mandatory anger management. In the hospital, Jared's dad told him not to blame himself for what happened with David.

The story again foreshadows a violent incident with David, which left Jared hospitalized and Jared's mom in anger management. Jared's mom's hatred for his father essentially left Jared homeless, as he didn't feel like he could even stay with his dad because he feared his mother's wrath. This again demonstrates how dysfunction within families can force kids to take undue responsibility for themselves. It also shows the downfall of resorting to violence as a way of showing love, as Jared's mom's violently protective nature does more harm than good in her son's life.



Presently, Jared's dad wakes up in the hospital, and they play cribbage before Jared leaves to catch the last bus back to Kitimat. While Jared waits for the bus, his mom texts him asking where he is and if he'll be home for dinner. He says that he's playing video games with Kelsey and Blake, and that he won't make it for dinner. He knows that she'll be angry when she finds out he's helping his dad. Jared doesn't want to live with his dad—he just doesn't want him to be homeless.

The juxtaposition of Jared's memory and the present shows how Jared has switched places with his father, both literally and figuratively (here, he visits his father in a hospital bed, whereas before his father visited him). In this sense, Jared has taken on the role of a father figure in his family, while his father's drug addiction has made him vulnerable and dependent on others, much like a child. Jared's concern about his family becoming homeless is one that would typically fall to a parent, not a child.



CHAPTER 8

Jared cuts his hair in a crew cut, the way Richie wears it. He then goes into the living room and sits with Richie, who is watching football. They talk about how Jared got beaten up at Powder House, and Richie mentions that Jared's mom wants Jared to carry a gun. Jared says that he likes his feet without bullet holes and is shocked when his joke makes Richie laugh. Richie tells Jared seriously that he has to get revenge, or whoever hit him will do it again. Then, they drink beers and watch the game, and Richie is a little nicer to him in the following days.

Here, Jared takes Nana Sophia's advice, trying to show Richie respect (by emulating his haircut and watching football) so that Richie will be nicer to him. But the very fact that Jared has to do this with someone who lives with him speaks to the persistent threat of violence in his life, even from his mom's boyfriend.



That weekend, Jared's mom wakes Jared up early to go to a friend's hunting cabin. Jared complains that it's cold, but she punches his shoulder, and he unwillingly changes into a new snowsuit that she gives him. Outside, Richie is sitting in a new monster truck loaded with two matching snowmobiles. Jared hopes that the truck isn't stolen, knowing his mom could get into deep trouble—but his mom assures him that someone owed them a debt, so they traded for it. Jared wonders if the person traded it willingly.

Jared's mom continues to use violence to try to toughen Jared up, but it comes across as threatening and unsettling to him. This is particularly evident in the fact that Jared wonders if his mom got the snowmobiles and truck by force—he knows that at any moment, she could turn violent. Jared's worries about his mother getting into trouble also illustrate his responsibility in the family, as he takes it upon himself to make sure that his mom doesn't act recklessly.



Richie drives the truck and the snowmobiles to the hunting cabin, and Jared feels himself going numb in the cold. Inside the cabin, Jared's mom starts a fire while Richie shows Jared how to load, maintain, and shoot a revolver. Jared reluctantly recites the names of the parts and tentatively loads the gun. In the afternoon, they shoot at a tree until it falls over. Jared makes a snide remark about hunting for a Christmas tree, and Richie asks how Jared can be grumpy on a day like this. Jared's mom chimes in to say that grenades always cheer her up.

On Monday, Jared's mom sells the truck and the snowmobiles to pay off the remainder of their mortgage. They buy pizza and beers to celebrate, and Jared's mom pulls him into a snuggle on the couch, though Jared protests that it's weird for her to do that. She tells him that he lived in her uterus and came out of her vagina, and Jared gets even more grossed out. She tells him to always use condoms, reminding him that she was his age when she had him and she doesn't want grandkids yet—but she doesn't regret him.

When Jared reminds his mom that Anita doesn't like him, Jared's mom says that Anita was messed up by nuns who thought everything Native was evil. Jared asks why Anita thought he was a Trickster. Jared's mom doesn't respond, but she pulls him close to her and says that his dad is dead to her, and that the blood in his veins is only hers. His dad screwed them over, and her mom screwed them over, so they should forget about them. She tells Jared that he has a big heart, but people will take advantage of it.

CHAPTER 9

Jared is shocked that Ebony Stewart is in his **basement**, even though she's pretended not to know him for years because she hangs with the popular crowd. She tells Jared that his cookies are good, but he says that he's trying to lay low on the cookies because someone attacked him. Ebony tells him that Jared can bake at her house while she has the place to herself for a week, if she gets half the cookies. She assures him that no one will jump him or tell on him. Jared considers her offer, thinking that he's close to getting his dad out of debt.

Jared's view of guns and hunting parallels his view of violence in his relationships. Richie and Jared's mom view the guns as necessary protection for Jared (and thus, teaching him to use them is their way of expressing love and protecting him). Jared, on the other hand, is very uncomfortable at the thought of hurting others, even to protect himself—just as he finds violent expressions of love confusing and uncomfortable.



Jared's mother's lessons in responsibility come as a result of not wanting Jared to repeat her mistakes, like having a child very young. This is how Jared has learned a lot of lessons through his life, taking it upon himself to be more responsible than his parents. This again suggests that children in dysfunctional families grow up more quickly—in this case, by learning from their parents' mistakes.



Jared's mom again hints at the fact that she views Jared's kindness and care for others as a weakness, because others will take advantage of him. This is why she uses violence to toughen him up—but as the hunting trip illustrated, Jared dislikes violent and would rather be able to trust the adults in his life. Additionally, Jared's mom's deflection from their family history hints at the fact that she's hiding the full extent of their family's involvement with tricksters like Wee'git.



There is a disparity between Jared and Ebony in their line of thinking: while Ebony is concerned with becoming popular with her peers by selling Jared's cookies, Jared is only concerned with making sure that his dad can get out of debt. This stark contrast illustrates how kids from dysfunctional families are often forced to be much more responsible and have much more mature concerns than their peers.



Ebony goes on, saying that she wants Jared to sell some to Dylan, who is her boyfriend. Jared says that Dylan's a jerk who runs his mouth, and that he doesn't want to aggravate Richie again if word gets around that he's cooking. Ebony assures him that Dylan will keep his mouth shut, and she tells Jared that high school would be a lot nicer with the hockey team backing him up. She puts her hand on his knee and whispers, "please?" Jared blushes, noticing her warmth and her chest, and he agrees. She tells him that he's going to become very popular, and Jared says snidely that it's a dream come true.

A few days later, Jared goes to Ebony's house and bakes the cookies while Ebony does her homework. He notices fluffy pastel bags with ribbons on the counter, and she tells him that he's going to use those bags for the cookies. With the right branding—and by selling to her friends instead of his—he can make triple the amount of money for half the cookies. While the cookies are baking, she and Jared clean the counter, and she gives him an old phone loaded with numbers of the people she wants him to sell to.

Dylan is the first person on the list, and when he arrives, he immediately makes fun of Jared's buzz cut. Ebony sells the rest of the cookies quickly, and within an hour her phone is buzzing; she has to put people on a list for next time. Ebony gives Jared more dates to cook, and though he's glad to have the money, he's bothered by the fact that she kicks him out immediately after baking. The guys at Powder House let him hang out and treat him like a real friend.

Later, Dylan bangs on Jared's door asking for more cookies, swaying from being both high and drunk. When Jared says he doesn't have more cookies, Dylan gets angry, and Jared tells him to go home. Dylan says that his dad will kill him if he goes back to the house. Then, Dylan's friend Bambam appears in the doorway to find him, but seeing Dylan's condition, he says that he's just going to leave him there. Jared is annoyed, saying that he doesn't want to babysit Dylan, but Bambam leaves. Jared texts Ebony to come get her boyfriend as Dylan falls asleep.

Jared wakes to the sounds of Dylan throwing up in the toilet. Dylan asks to borrow the money Ebony gave Jared for a cab, but Jared jokes that he blew it on cocaine and hookers. Dylan says that he has \$50 at home, and Jared can have it if he drives him there. Jared agrees, and they drive up to the reserve at Kitamaat Village. Dylan's house is two stories, with two cars in the driveway and tons of Christmas decorations. Dylan sneaks in and comes back out with a \$20 bill, saying that he'll give Jared the rest if he drives Dylan home after practice.

Again, Jared emphasizes that he doesn't have the same concerns as his peers in high school. He's primarily concerned with avoiding abuse at home and earning money for his father, while Ebony assumes that Jared is most worried about protection from the hockey team. Again, this highlights how Jared's home life has made him much more responsible than other kids his age, and how his concerns carry much more gravity.



The book continues to show disparities between Jared and Ebony in maturity and priorities. Ebony is concerned with her homework, her branding, and her popularity, while Jared simply wants to make money so that he can support his father.



Even though Jared is more mature than many of his peers, he still has to endure typical teenage drama, like being bullied or not feeling like he has friends. But in the context of Jared's problems at home, these seem like relatively miniscule issues that Jared quickly gets over—he has more pressing concerns, like financially supporting his father. This again reinforces how a difficult home life can force a young person to focus on more mature problems and take on greater responsibility.



Jared is not the only one who uses drugs as a form of escapism, as Dylan gets high and drunk in order to avoid his harsh father. Here, the book starts to explore the frustrating ramifications that drugs and alcohol can have. This is true not just for those using, but those who are forced to deal with the users (like Jared in this moment), demonstrating how drugs and alcohol can actually create problems rather than helping people escape from them.



Jared again displays maturity and responsibility far greater than that of his peers. In pointing out Dylan's house, two cars, and the Christmas decorations, the book implies that Dylan leads a much wealthier and more stable lifestyle than Jared does. For Jared, this difference between his and his peers' home lives likely adds to his sense of responsibility to earn money, as it makes his parents' financial and personal struggles all the more obvious by contrast.



Suddenly, the lights go on, and Dylan's dad, Mr. Wilkinson, comes outside. He argues quietly with Dylan before asking Jared if he has a license. Jared asks the man not to drag him into his family's crap, and Mr. Wilkinson responds that Dylan doesn't need help from "the likes of" Jared. They trade insults as Jared remarks that Dylan was really classy, passing out and puking in Jared's **basement**. As Jared drives away, Dylan salutes him in amusement. At school on Monday, Ebony and Dylan approach him. Dylan high-fives Jared for telling off his dad, and they joke around, but Ebony is annoyed that Jared got Dylan grounded.

After school, Mrs. Jaks tells Jared that she's going to see an oncologist in Vancouver and needs help getting the house ready in case she starts chemotherapy right away. Jared spends the next Saturday shoveling the driveway while Mr. Jaks complains about the Russians stealing his potatoes. When they go inside, Mrs. Jaks asks if Jared will visit Mr. Jaks in respite care while she's in Vancouver. Jared agrees and offers to get her some medicinal marijuana if she needs it. She laughs off his suggestion and tells him that she has spaghetti with moose meatballs when he's done with the driveway, kissing his cheek. Jared hopes that she'll pull through the leukemia.

Back at home, Nana Sophia messages Jared on Facebook, telling him that she sent him Christmas money. She insists that the money is meant for him, not his parents, and that he's not responsible for the bad decisions his parents make. Jared writes, "Love you Nana," and she replies, "Love you more, cutie."

After Jared signs off, he puts up a small Christmas tree that he bought from the second-hand store, but it doesn't make the **room** any merrier. Then, Blake stops by with some beers and a black eye that Jared ignores, asking if he can stay the night. He tells Jared not to open the door if his dad comes by. Jared takes out the handgun his mom gave him and tells Blake that the ammo is in the nightstand, showing him the basics. Jared finds another sleeping bag and they watch a movie together. While they watch, Jared notices Blake nervously glancing at the door, and it reminds Jared of how he used to feel when David was in his life.

Mr. Wilkinson saying that he doesn't need help from "the likes of" implies that he's judged Jared as inferior to Dylan in some way. This is ironic, as Jared points out, because he was responsible enough to take care of Dylan and get him home safely, while Dylan was drunk to the point of making himself sick in order to avoid his problems.



The book continues to contrast Jared's childlike qualities with those that show how mature he is. In some ways, Jared still enjoys more innocent aspects of life, like having spaghetti and moose meatballs prepared for him because Mrs. Jaks knows it's his favorite. But in other ways, prompted by having adults in his life who deeply need his help, Jared is much more mature: he helps with the housework, watches Mr. Jaks, and even offers to get Mrs. Jaks medical marijuana. All of these actions suggest Jared's sense of responsibility to care for the Jakses, a quality that he's developed simply to survive life with irresponsible parents.



While Nana Sophia insists that Jared isn't responsible for his parents' "crappy decisions," the book suggests that those decisions are exactly what have made Jared mature and responsible beyond his years. In addition, the book again underscores how Jared's relationship with Nana Sophia is different from most others in his life, as Nana Sophia provides him with unconditional love and support in a way that his parents don't.



Jared observes the problem with mixing love and violence in a relationship, noting how his friend Blake's violent dad makes him feel constantly on-edge. Jared hints again at the incident between him and David (which the book has not yet fully explained), but this dynamic also reflects Jared's relationship with his mom. Like Blake's dad, Jared's mom brings violence into his life and forces him to be similarly vigilant in defending himself against it, which undermines the loving aspects of their relationship.



CHAPTER 10

Martina Yelan approaches Jared at the bus stop after his last final, telling him to text her when he has more cookies and writing her number on his hand. He takes the bus downtown, gets money from his bank account, and then waits for the bus to Terrace. A Native man then approaches Jared as Jared checks his phone: 17 messages from Destiny. She gave birth to her son Ben a week ago, but the baby's dad abandoned her. Jared feels bad for her, but he was hoping he wouldn't have to stay after dropping off the money at the landlord's office.

When Jared gets on the bus to Terrace, the Native guy sits next to him and tries to make conversation, but Jared starts to get creeped out. The man introduces himself as Wee'git and says that he's Jared's real dad. As he starts to explain that Jared's mom shot him in the head, Jared calls him a freak and gets up, pushing to the back of the bus. He watches as the guy gets off at the next stop, but when he looks out the window, he only sees a raven flying away. Jared tells himself that the man must have been crazy.

Jared gets off the bus at Terrace and brings the rent money to the landlord's office, catching his dad up on all the back rent he owed. When Jared arrives at his dad's apartment, Destiny answers the door, her eyes swollen and red. She asks Jared if he wants to meet Ben, but Jared says that he can't stay long. Destiny helps him hold Ben, which makes Jared nervous. He asks where his dad is, and Destiny says that one of Shirley's brothers died, so they went to the funeral—but she suspects they also wanted to avoid Destiny and Ben.

Destiny is upset that everyone seems to be leaving her, so she asks Jared if he can stay the night. Jared reluctantly agrees but says that he has to catch the last bus back, because it doesn't run on the weekends. They watch the news together, and Destiny tells Jared that he's a good uncle as she makes Ben's formula. Destiny shows Jared how to change the baby's diaper and make a bottle. Ben throws up when Jared burps him. The clock ticks past the time Jared would have to leave—he's stuck for the weekend. Ben goes to sleep, and Jared and Destiny play Uno together.

On Sunday after dinner, Destiny goes out for diapers and doesn't come back. Jared texts her, but she doesn't respond. The baby starts crying, so Jared makes a bottle for him. Ben drinks his bottle and fusses as the hours pass. The next time Ben wakes, Jared can't get the formula right, and Ben keeps throwing up. He falls asleep but wakes up three hours later, screaming. Jared decides that he's never having kids, sleeping fitfully the rest of the night.

Even though Nana Sophia warned Jared not to use the money she gave him for his father, Jared still takes it out of his bank account to help his dad and Destiny pay the rent that they owe to their landlord. Contrary to Nana Sophia's admonishment that Jared isn't responsible for others' decisions, he still feels obligated to support his family because his father isn't able to take responsibility himself.



Though the trickster figure Wee'git continues to have a mysterious presence in Jared's life, Jared refuses to acknowledge that the man on the bus might be telling him the truth. In dismissing the man as crazy, just as he dismissed the raven as a hallucination earlier, Jared is again avoiding his problems rather than confronting them directly.



Here, Jared takes on actual parental responsibility—holding a baby—while his own dad is essentially absent from his and Destiny's lives. Jared's dad and Shirley are trying to escape a new responsibility of helping Destiny with her son, causing her to take more responsibility as well. This again speaks to how parents' irresponsibility and neglect can force their children to grow up and fend for themselves before they're necessarily ready to do so.



Destiny's sentiments here emphasize that Jared is more mature than most of the adults in his life. While Jared's father is trying to escape any responsibility of helping Destiny care for her son, Jared helps her despite the fact that he has no obligation to do so. Growing up with difficult (and often absent) parents has made Jared internalize the maturity that this situation forced him to develop, reinforcing how difficult home lives prompt kids to grow up and take on greater responsibility.



Although Jared doesn't know where Destiny is or what she's doing, her absence forces Jared to take on even more responsibility in caring for an infant whom he only just learned to feed and change. He's used to his parents abandoning him, which seems to have primed Jared to step up and act maturely in situations like this.



Destiny staggers home late the next morning with the diapers. Jared is furious that she didn't ask him to watch Ben and just took off. She says that she'll pay him, but Jared points out that she's paying him with the money he gave her. Destiny reminds him that they're family, but Jared says that she doesn't get to dump her kid on him when she wants to go to a party. She shouts at him angrily for leaving when things get hard, but Jared simply says that he doesn't like being played. She yells at him that he's a bad uncle.

When Jared gets back to his house, Blake is gone; he left Jared thank-you beer in the fridge. Jared crashes, and when he wakes up, he has eight texts from Destiny, saying that she loves him, and that Ben misses his uncle. Jared goes upstairs and finds his mom in the kitchen. She tells him to lay off the partying for a while—he smells like vomit. Jared asks if his mom thought of not having him, but she assures him she never regretted him.

The fact that Destiny went to a party without telling Jared where she was going provides a contrast between her recklessness and thoughtlessness (which is perhaps more typical of an average teenager) versus Jared's willingness to be the caretaker that Ben needs. This again shows how his family's dysfunction has taught him to take on greater responsibility than other kids his age.



Jared's mom's assumption that he was partying is very different from what really happened, as the vomit she smells is actually from the baby he was caring for. This again highlights how Jared is more responsible than most people his age. Even though he does party at times, he is also responsible for those around him—Ben, Destiny, and his parents—in a way that's atypical of a 16-year-old.



CHAPTER 11

Two hundred fifty-two million years ago on Earth, the trilobites were “going out for Starbucks before work.” They avoided the mammals and reptiles—anything that could eat them. They had survived for 200 million years and had made it through an extinction event only 8 million years earlier. But a new age dawned: Earth had a huge amount of gas, asteroids smashed through the sky, and a volcano erupted, taking out 9 out of 10 species. The world went dark, and the ocean became an acid bath. The trilobites were blindsided by the end of the world, saying, “whoa, man. What the hell?” All of them died.

This passage from the unnamed narrator again touches on environmental destruction. This passage references Earth's most severe mass extinction event, the Permian-Triassic extinction event. By anthropomorphizing the trilobites (attributing human speech and behavior to them), the narrator suggests that human beings could be just as blindsided by an extinction event. And given that the novel has already mentioned the Anthropocene (the ongoing human-driven extinction event), this implies that people's environmental destruction could cause their own extinction.



CHAPTER 12

Jared wakes on January 1, 2013 covered in a Buzz Lightyear comforter in an unfamiliar room that's full of *Doctor Who* paraphernalia. A Native kid greets Jared and asks if he wants breakfast, but Jared asks for “hair of the dog” as his stomach lurches. The boy says that it's a dry household before thanking Jared for saving him last night from Dylan at the party. Jared asks what happened, worried what Ebony would do if he embarrassed Dylan publicly.

Jared waking up completely unaware of where he is illustrates how he has been using drugs to escape reality—to the point that he is making himself black out and not remember incidents of the previous night. He also wants to use “hair of the dog” (drinking alcohol to stave off a hangover) to further that escapism, so that he doesn't have to confront the negative consequences of drinking so much. This illustrates how addiction and alcohol use can be a cycle, as people may experience the negative consequences of addictions and use drugs even more as a result.



The boy explains that Jared, Dylan, and some other friends were playing tag with firecrackers and Dylan's sister didn't like it—she told the boy to stop them, and Dylan got angry. When Dylan and his friends tried to throw the boy in a snowbank, Jared stopped them; when Dylan started to make fun of Jared, Jared called Dylan out and ran his mouth. Jared groans, wishing that one day he would wake up with an attractive girl instead of in some random kid's room.

The boy introduces himself as George, and he tells Jared that he put up a video of what happened the previous night—he also reveals that Dylan is getting thrown off the hockey team. Jared asks George to take the video down, worried that Dylan will be mad at him. George recalls a time when Dylan took his pants, swirled him, and filmed him going all the way home. Then, Jared asks where his own clothes are, and George explains that his mom is washing them. Dylan dumped a keg on Jared's head, and Jared wouldn't tell George where he lived, so George and his mom took him in for the night.

Jared asks where George lives, and he says that he's two houses down from Dylan on the Kitamaat reserve. George asks what clan Jared belongs to, but Jared simply says that his mom doesn't talk to her family. George talks about his family for a bit, but Jared can't focus on what George is saying and asks to take a shower. In the bathroom, Jared gets nauseous and throws up in the toilet. After his shower, Jared finds his clothes neatly folded, and George brings him ginger ale and nausea pills.

Jared checks his phone and texts his mom a happy New Year. He also has 17 texts from Destiny, who assumed that he would stop by his dad's place so that she could go out for a bit on New Year's Eve. She calls Jared a selfish prick, and Jared texts her to say that he told her he wouldn't babysit—he was worried that she would dump Ben on him and disappear.

George puts on a DVD, but Jared is too tired to pay attention. He thanks George for being his crash pad. George asks if Jared can call him Crashpad, and Jared agrees before heading out. Jared goes down to Dylan's house and cracks the door open—the house is littered with empty bottles and food, and a couple of guys are passed out on the floor. Jared goes into Dylan's room, where Dylan is throwing up into a trash can.

Jared again demonstrates his responsibility, even when drunk: despite the fact that Dylan is his friend, he still wants to protect George from bullying. This continues to underscore Jared's parental instinct, which speaks to the idea that children from dysfunctional families often develop greater maturity than their peers.



Unlike many of his peers, Jared doesn't enjoy abusing or bullying others. This derives from the fact that he's more mature than most of his peers, as well as the fact that his own violent experiences have been very painful for him and made him resistant to committing violence against others.



Jared uses alcohol to try to avoid bullying and violence. But the fact that he almost ends up out on the street for the night and gets sick afterward illustrates that alcohol and drugs can be even more harmful and create just as many problems for a person as what they're trying to avoid. Instead, the book suggests, it's important to confront one's problems directly rather than trying to escape from them.



The book continues to contrast Jared with Destiny, who blames Jared for not babysitting Ben so she could go out on New Year's Eve. But Jared never made that kind of commitment, and he worried that she would shift all of her responsibility for Ben onto him, as she did before. This again speaks to the difference in maturity between Jared, whose home life has forced him to grow up quickly, and his peers.



Jared isn't the only one dealing with the ramifications of drinking too much—many of his high school peers use alcohol in order to escape their own realities. But they, too, only add to their problems (making messes and getting sick) as a result.



Jared apologizes to Dylan for being a jerk and says that Dylan can beat him up if he wants to. Dylan is perplexed, so Jared just offers to make him some coffee. Dylan throws up again while Jared gets apology texts from Destiny, and Jared thinks that he hates his life. He then checks his voicemail: Mrs. Jaks left him a message asking for help two days earlier. After the holiday parties, Jared can't remember what he was doing two days earlier.

Jared and Dylan drink coffee together, and Jared gives Dylan a heads up that George made a video of the previous night. Hearing this, Dylan punches Jared in the face, spilling coffee over Jared's freshly washed jacket. Dylan says that he's going to kill George, but Jared assures him that George is going to take down the video. Jared asks if they're all good, and Dylan responds that he's too hungover to kill Jared.

Later, Dylan drops off Jared at Mrs. Jaks's house, which is under several feet of snow. Jared shovels a path from her porch to the road and knocks on the door, but there's no answer, and he doesn't want to wake Mrs. Jaks if she's sleeping. Jared sits on the porch drinking a small bottle of vodka he stole from Dylan's house. Jared's mom doesn't like how much he does for Mrs. Jaks, but after everything that happened with David, Jared feels he owes Mrs. Jaks—he even went to visit Mr. Jaks in respite care.

Wind and ice sting Jared's face, and he decides to return home. In the kitchen, Jared's mom compliments him sarcastically on his black eye, and Jared explains that Dylan was in a bad mood. His mom tells Jared that if Dylan keeps it up, he's going to get "an ass full of buckshot," though Jared isn't thrilled about the idea of his mom doing this.

Jared's mom then makes macaroni and cheese for herself and Jared while smoking a cigarette, and she sarcastically toasts to a new year of dealing with the same problems. Jared remarks that she should write for Hallmark. When Jared's mom retorts that he gets his smart mouth from his dad, Jared's inner voice comments that Jared's talent for self-destruction comes from his mom.

Jared uses alcohol to try to escape from the problems in his life and the responsibilities that he constantly takes upon himself. But when recovers from this drunken stupor, he still hates his life and must deal with the problems that existed before. This again implies that the best avenue to solve one's problems is not to escape them with drugs and alcohol, but to confront them directly.



Just as the book draws a contrast between Jared's mom and Nana Sophia, it also contrasts Dylan and George. While Jared thinks that Dylan is his friend, Dylan poses a constant violent threat that makes their friendship painful and emotionally confusing, just like Jared's relationship with his mom.



Here, the book again shows Jared's two different sides. On the one hand, Jared is very responsible, as he helps Mrs. Jaks and visits Mr. Jaks in respite because he feels compelled to take care of the adults around him. On the other hand, Jared still uses alcohol to try to dull or escape from that same sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, the book again hints that Jared experienced a traumatic incident involving David, now implying that Mrs. Jaks helped him with that problem.



Jared's mom's threat of shooting Dylan with buckshot again shows how she views committing violence as a form of protection and love. But Jared's hesitation suggests that he's uncomfortable with violence as an expression of love.



Jared's inner voice critiques his mom's inability to deal with her problems in a healthy way. Instead, she uses drugs and alcohol to emotionally numb herself, which Jared also struggles with. The voice reinforces the book's suggestion that people should confront their problems directly, as avoiding them only allows those problems to harm—and even destroy—a person.



CHAPTER 13

The next day, Jared takes the bus to Terrace to visit his dad. As he travels, Ebony texts him that they need to talk, but Jared's sick of dealing with her silly gossip about who's popular or who has the latest high-end purse. When Jared arrives at his dad's apartment, his dad asks about his eye, but Jared assures him that it was just a good time gone wrong.

Jared's dad thanks him for coming—the landlord is annoyed about the rent. Hearing this, Jared is confused, because he paid the landlord. Jared also suggests that they phone the insurance company to make sure that his dad is getting his disability check. Jared's dad demurs and starts to put on his shoes, but he struggles, so Jared helps him. His dad says that they should just get the rent paid, but Jared notices that he seems cagey. Jared realizes that his dad *did* get a check from the insurance company—he's just been taking money from Jared anyway.

When Jared figures out that his dad has been lying, his dad assures him that he'll pay him back. Jared doesn't know what to do—his dad was a decent guy until the alcohol and drugs, and Jared knows that if they lose the apartment, Destiny and Ben won't have a place to live. Jared takes out his wallet and gives his dad the money. He thanks him, but Jared tells his father that he's not coming back.

After leaving his dad's apartment, Jared gets a pepperoni pizza and scrolls through his messages—Ebony has texted him angrily, and Nana Sophia sent pictures of herself in Venice. After Jared eats, he gets back on the bus, and his mom texts, asking if he's home for dinner. When he says yes, she replies, "Luv ur guts." Jared figures she's drunk and lonely, but he rereads it. When he writes, "Back atcha," she replies, "Sarcastic lil shit ur lucky I luv u nuff not to murder u in ur sleep."

Jared's easy dismissal of Ebony's gossip—particularly as he is on his way to help pay his dad's rent—again highlights how Jared's dysfunctional family has caused him to grow up much faster than his peers, who have much more childish concerns (like popularity at school).



The way Jared helps his dad put on his shoes is a small but important gesture, as it reinforces the role reversal between Jared and his father. One might normally expect a parent to help a small child put on their shoes—but here, Jared steps into that parental role. This is what makes his dad's betrayal all the more painful, because Jared is already supporting his father in a way he shouldn't have to—and yet his father is taking advantage of him because Jared is so caring and responsible.



Jared acknowledges how difficult his father's addiction has been on both his father and on Jared himself. While people might use drugs and alcohol, to escape from or cope with problems, the book implies (through Jared's experiences) that using these substances causes more harm than good. In this case, Jared's dad's drug use is so harmful that it forces Jared to cut his dad out of his life.



The fact that Jared rereads his mom's text telling him that she loves him only underscores how infrequently his mom gives him straightforward affection like this, and how valuable it is to him. However, this text is followed up with a vaguely violent one—and in this way, the threat of violence is always lurking beneath the surface of their relationship. Jared seems to be longing for a relationship that's warm and affectionate (like his bond with Nana Sophia), but his mom continues to mix love and violence in a confusing way.



CHAPTER 14

The book flashes back to when Jared's dad lost his job at Eurocan, the local paper mill, after eight years working there. The paper mill's closure puts over 500 people out of work, and his dad starts to drink a lot while people steadily move out of the neighborhood. A few months later, Jared's dad moves out, and Jared's mom cries all the time as she has to start selling their things to pay the bills.

Soon after, Jared's mom meets David. He brings flowers, pays bills and makes dinner; his mom can't stop smiling. David expects good grades from Jared, but Jared can't focus. He starts hanging out with Blake and Kelsey more, so that he can lose himself in gaming and booze, and his grades get worse and worse. Jared hides his report card in the bottom drawer, until one evening when he gets home, David is waiting in his bedroom.

Pinning Jared to the bed, David begins to break Jared's ribs slowly, and Jared squeals like an injured dog. Then, Jared hears a mechanical thud, and David spasms. Jared's mom drags Jared off the bed, and David flails around, his feet having been nailed to the floor with a nail gun. Crying, Jared says that he wants to leave, but his mom says that David likes Jared's fear. She hits David with a chair until he falls over, and she nails his underarm to the floor. She presses the nail gun into Jared's hand, telling him to show David he isn't afraid. "The world is hard," she says. "You have to be harder."

Jared refuses to use the nail gun on David, but his mom won't let him leave until he does. Suddenly, like a weird dream, Jared pops out of his body and finds himself outside his house. He can still hear David screaming, but it's day instead of night, and the sky sputters like a TV with a bad connection. Jared walks to the Jakses' house and wonders if he's dead. He walks through the front door and feels a little zap like static. He sees Mrs. Jaks, and though she speaks a Native language, he can understand her. He tells her that there's a bad man in his house who's hurt.

Just after Jared has lost his relationship with his father in the present, the book expands on more of their history, fleshing out how his father became so absent in his life during his parents' divorce. The book's reference to Jared's dad drinking illustrates how he used alcohol to escape the problem of losing his job—and perhaps, as a result, also lost his marriage. This suggests that using alcohol as a form of escapism only makes his problems worse.



Just as Jared's father uses alcohol to numb himself and ignore his problems, Jared starts to do the same. In the wake of his parents' divorce and his father moving out, it makes sense for Jared to try to find a coping mechanism. But the book also underscores that this creates further problems for Jared, like slipping grades, rather than solving the issues that he's trying to escape from.



The book has heavily foreshadowed this traumatic incident with David, and it reveals why Jared has a hard time navigating relationships that mix love and violence. While Jared understands that his mother uses violence to protect him, he is also disturbed by her capacity to hurt David just as David has hurt him. Jared's mother's statements about Jared needing to be hard recur throughout the novel (previously, he heard these words in his head while he was crying over Baby Killer's death), indicating how they seem to haunt Jared. He recognizes the wisdom in the words, but he is also uncomfortable about having to commit violence against others. As such, the book portrays love expressed through violence as confusing and emotionally painful.



Up until this point, Jared has dismissed the surrealism in his life as drug-induced hallucinations or evidence that he is going crazy. Here, Jared's ability to leave his own body, as well as his ability to understand the Native language that Mrs. Jaks is speaking, hint that something supernatural is going on. But, again, he avoids addressing this possibility by telling himself that he's dead. He's unwilling to confront the magic in his life, much like he tries to hide from his more practical, everyday problems.



Mrs. Jaks then pops out of her own body and walks hand in hand with Jared back to his house. His footprints glow behind him, and he sees an ambulance parked in the driveway. Jared's mom is crying and saying his name, and he sees himself on the stretcher with blank eyes. Then, Mrs. Jaks lifts Jared up and puts him back in his body.

Again, there seems to be something supernatural going on, as Mrs. Jaks and Jared are inexplicably able to leave their own bodies. Meanwhile, Mrs. Jaks contrasts with Jared's mom. Whereas Jared's mom tries to protect him with violence, here Mrs. Jaks provides him with comfort and love, guiding him back to his body when he is hurting and lost. This is why he and Mrs. Jaks have such a strong relationship in the present, because she helped him (rather than pressuring him to commit violence, as his mom did) when he was most vulnerable.



CHAPTER 15

In the present, when Jared gets home from his dad's, Jared's mom is throwing a party at her house as a pre-game before going out to bars. Alex Gunborg and a few of his Goth friends show up, but his mom will only tolerate underage drinking from Jared's friends, so she tells them to leave. After a few drinks, Jared heads down to his **basement**. Alex asks if they can hang in his room, but Jared says no, and they sneer at him and leave.

Jared's mom's constant partying adds another layer to her and Jared's flipped dynamics. While she wants to drink and party like a teenager, Jared instead wants to have a quiet night in his room in the basement. Additionally, the fact that Jared can't really confide in his mom about his dad's betrayal for fear of her reaction reinforces how unhealthy and unsupportive their relationship is. He doesn't have anyone to lean on in this painful moment.



In the **basement**, Jared can feel a headache growing. He's upset that his dad thought he could take advantage of him. His dad was always honest, as long as he could remember. Jared gets up for another drink, and looking at his Christmas tree, he thinks that he hates Christmas and chucks it outside, feeling lighter after doing so.

Jared continues to use alcohol to dull the emotional pain that his problems cause, both in drinking at the party and in drinking here alone. Meanwhile, throwing out the Christmas tree symbolizes how Jared feels betrayed by his father's greed at a time usually marked by generosity and quality time with family.



At that moment, Destiny arrives. She's done her hair in curls and put on makeup—Jared realizes that he forgot how pretty she is. Destiny says that Jared's dad told her about what happened. Jared asks if she knew his dad was lying to him, and she says yes: Jared's dad got his first check in December and used it to help her buy things for Ben, but his dad feels guilty about it. Jared wonders how his dad can let Destiny do his talking for him.

The fact that Destiny comes to explain her father's actions further reinforces how the children in the family take more responsibility for their parents' actions than the parents do for their own actions. They are unable (or unwilling) to take on that responsibility, instead putting their children in a difficult position.



Destiny notices the cardboard poster of **Darth Vader** taped to the ceiling, which the guys from Powder House gave Jared. She then starts to pick up beer cans from the floor, and though Jared protests, she insists on helping him. At that moment, Jared realizes that if his mom knew Destiny was here, she would get really angry. Jared tries to explain this to Destiny, who suggests that they invite Jared's mom for dinner—but Jared knows that this is a terrible idea. Destiny then reveals that she discovered Ben's father is married and just had a baby with his wife, too, and she starts to sob.

The cardboard poster of Darth Vader again reminds readers that for all of Jared's maturity, he still is just a kid who likes Star Wars and spending time with his friends. But, at the same time, Jared also has to deal with balancing his mom's volatility and comforting Destiny and supporting his dad. This contrast makes it clear that his family forces him to take on a level of responsibility that's arguably unfair or inappropriate for a teenager.



Jared tries to comfort Destiny as she cries into his shoulder, until she kisses him. Just then, Jared is very aware of her body against his. She tells him that he's a good man and that he was there when everyone else ran away. Jared gets up and grabs another beer. He's confused: she smells good, he's drunk, and she called him a good man, which are words that he doesn't associate with himself. He doesn't want to be her boyfriend, or Ben's stepdad. But she's pretty, he feels sorry for her, and a sad part of him wants to have sex with his stepsister.

Destiny asks Jared if he wants to sit next to her, but Jared tries to play it off, saying that she's his sister and it's weird. Destiny tries to say that they aren't really siblings, but Jared insists that they are. They sit and drink in silence as the party goes on above their heads. Then, Jared then gives Destiny his bed and pulls out a sleeping bag for himself, and they say "Night, bro" and "Night, sis" before turning out the light.

CHAPTER 16

Jared spends the next morning scrubbing the **basement**, concerned by a fuzzy memory of almost making out with Destiny. He gets more ranting messages from Ebony, and he's glad that his dad is back on his feet so that he doesn't have to bake more marijuana cookies for Ebony. He's frustrated that she's blaming him for Dylan acting like a jerk.

Because Jared's couch still smells like dog fur, Jared dreamed about Baby Killer the previous night, which makes him feel lonely. He decides to go to the store to get something that will get the smell out, checking in with his mom and Richie to see if they need anything—but Richie is just annoyed that Jared is talking to them while they're still in bed.

Jared's head throbs as he leaves the house, and he decides to check in on Mrs. Jaks. A pretty girl with dark hair, wearing Princess Leia buns and a white bathrobe, opens the door. When Jared introduces himself and asks if Mrs. Jaks is okay, the girl says that her grandmother's in a mood—the meat freezer broke down while Mrs. Jaks was getting chemotherapy, and it's stinking up the house. The girl asks if he can help clear it out, and Jared replies that when he gets back from the store, he can take the rotten meat to the dump.

Again, as a result of his dysfunctional family, Jared has to deal with emotionally complex situations, like his stepsister kissing him and flirting with him. The fact that Destiny calls Jared a "good man," even though he doesn't fully recognize this in himself, only adds to Jared's characterization as someone who is much more mature than a typical 16-year-old.



Both Jared and Destiny drink in order to avoid the awkwardness of their situation. In the end, reinforcing to each other that they're siblings is also a way of playing off that awkwardness, as they try to be mature and level-headed instead of giving into their desires.



Here, the book again recognizes the problems with using alcohol as a coping mechanism or an escape from reality. Drinking nearly caused Jared even greater problems rather than allowing him to escape from his issues, as it lowered his inhibitions to the point that he nearly had sex with his stepsister.



The fact that Jared still feels lonely without Baby Killer underscores how much he misses having her unconditional love in his life. His mom and Richie, however, don't show any of that affection, even as Jared tries to take care of them and bring them what they need. By contrasting these two dynamics, the book emphasizes the value of relationships that are characterized by warmth and unconditional love, as opposed to those that are fraught with selfishness and neglect.



Jared continues to demonstrate his responsibility in consistently checking up on the Jaks. In addition, the fact that Jared first meets this girl while she is wearing a Princess Leia costume establishes an immediate connection between them, because Jared's Darth Vader poster has hinted that Jared is a fan of Star Wars.



Just then, Mrs. Jaks calls to Sarah—the girl—to close the door and stop letting the cold in. Jared says goodbye, and as he leaves, he wishes that he had scrubbed himself instead of the **basement**. His inner voice tells him that Sarah probably wouldn't notice Jared's body odor because of the rotting meat smell, and the voice teases him, calling him Romeo. Jared is surprised by his inner voice, wondering if he's going crazy and hearing someone else's voice in his head.

The next day, Jared wakes up naked next to Sarah under his sleeping bag. He tries to remember how they got there: they spent a few hours cleaning out Mrs. Jaks's freezer, and then Jared went to a party and did several rounds of Jell-O shots—but he doesn't remember Sarah being there. Sarah is scrolling through his iTouch, commenting that he was really comfortable putting on a condom when he was drunk before making fun of the Nickelback on his playlist. Jared gets up to throw up in the garbage can. His inner voice calls him classy, and he tells the voice to shut up. Sarah says that she has to stop doing ecstasy—she doesn't want anyone to know that she hooked up with someone who likes Nickelback.

After hunting down her clothes, Sarah leaves, but Jared stays in bed all day. He then cleans up the vomit in his trash can and throws his laundry in the wash. When he's taking out the garbage, he sees Sarah on his front porch. Sarah tells him that Mrs. Jaks invited him for dinner, and when Jared asks if it's okay for him to come over given the fact that they slept together, Sarah insists that she can handle it. They trade barbs about their taste in music, and Jared says that he'll be over shortly. Sarah cautions Jared not to mention Mr. Jaks at dinner, as Mrs. Jaks feels guilty about keeping him in respite care even though she's home. Jared shakes his head as he watches Sarah walk away.

At dinner, Mrs. Jaks is wearing makeup, though it doesn't hide her sallowness from the chemotherapy. Sarah and Jared set the table and serve dinner for her, and when Mrs. Jaks tells Sarah how to set the table, Sarah says that she shouldn't be so hung up on bourgeois rituals and that she should “decolonize.” Jared can tell that they've had this argument many times. The three of them eat together and then watch *Wheel of Fortune* after dinner. Mrs. Jaks starts crying, and Sarah holds her grandmother's hand while Jared does the dishes. When Mrs. Jaks goes to bed, Sarah comes into the kitchen and hugs Jared, telling him that she feels awful.

The inner voice calls Jared Romeo—a reference to Shakespeare's [Romeo and Juliet](#)—to imply Jared's romantic interest, foreshadowing that Jared's relationship with Sarah will likely develop into something more than friendship. But Jared again dismisses his inner voice as evidence that he is crazy, and he tries to put it out of his mind. This is another way that Jared is avoiding his problems, as he ignores an issue that legitimately worries him.



This passage illustrates the multitude of ways that Jared is avoiding confronting his problems, and the negative ramifications of doing so. Jared again got so drunk that he doesn't remember what happened the previous night, and as a result, he also had sex with someone without remembering that he did so, which could have very serious consequences (like STDs or unintended pregnancy). In addition, Jared continues to try and ignore his inner voice, despite the fact that its presence in his life seems to be ever-increasing.



Jared continues to deal with the ramifications of using alcohol to dull reality: the next day, he doesn't get to enjoy the day and has to deal with getting sick. Separately, Sarah's warning about mentioning Mr. Jaks illustrates that she, too, has had to grow up with greater awareness and maturity than her peers. It's unclear what Sarah's home life was like before she came to live with grandparents—but given that her mom sent her away, it's likely that she has a troubled home life, much like Jared does. And now, she must shoulder the burden of caring for two sick grandparents by herself.



Sarah demonstrates how her own family problems are taking a toll on her and forcing her to grow up: she has to comfort her very ill grandmother while her grandfather is stuck in respite care. This again speaks to the idea that children with difficult home lives are often forced to take on greater responsibility and develop greater maturity than other kids their age might be. In addition, Sarah's reference to “decolonizing” refers to overcoming customs and rules that were brought about by Europeans' colonization of Canada, indicating that she's interested in connecting more to her Indigenous culture.



CHAPTER 17

When Jared returns to school, he feels like he needs a vacation from his Christmas vacation. While dropping him off, Jared's mom tells him that she's away for the evening and gives him \$20 for food. Jared comments that Richie is a big boy who can sell his own drugs without her, but Jared's mom just rolls her eyes.

At school, several students excitedly greet Jared, calling him "Cookie Dude." Crashpad approaches Jared and says that someone put clips of Jared spliced together on YouTube—Jared falling off of things, throwing up on a trampoline, and failing at water-skiing. Jared says that he'll survive, figuring that the only way to deal with this is to laugh it off. But surprisingly, he also gets attention from girls: a few approach him with new interest and ask him to hang out. They also tell him that Ebony was the one to post the video.

At the end of the day, Jared sees Sarah coming out of the front office—she's talking to a teacher about fracking and Indigenous politics. When Sarah finishes, Jared asks if she's attending his school now. Sarah immediately changes the subject to the Idle No More walk, where Native people are protesting an oil company and budget bills that interfere with Native treaties. Jared says that the bill is pretty much a done deal, but Sarah accuses him of conceding too easily.

After school, Jared and Sarah walk home together, picking up some chow mein from the nearby takeout. He thinks that their silence is comfortable as he considers how much time and effort Ebony took to make the video of him—he's actually sort of flattered. When Jared and Sarah get back to his **room**, she's glad to hang out with him because Mrs. Jaks doesn't have Wi-Fi. Jared texts Crashpad about the Idle No More protest, and Crashpad says that he's going to be a drummer at the walk. Sarah holds up her phone, showing Jared the protests in Vancouver and wishing she was there.

At that moment, Dylan knocks on the **basement** door and apologizes that Ebony made the video. Jared glibly says that it's fine and shuts the door on him. When Jared returns to Sarah, she says that his couch smells like dog, and Jared explains that he had a dog that died. Sarah replies that she's sorry. As it grows dark, Sarah asks if he wants to fool around, saying that he's slightly better than masturbating. Jared jokes that no one could resist a line like that, and she slides a hand up his shirt.

Here, Jared hints at the fact that the partying he did over Christmas vacation has not actually given him an escape—in many ways, it only exacerbated his problems and made him want a break from the partying and drinking. This suggests that, while using drugs and alcohol may feel like a way of gaining control in the moment, these substances actually diminish people's control over their lives in the long term.



The video clips of all the embarrassing things Jared has done while drunk illustrate just how out of control his substance abuse has become—particularly given the fact that he doesn't seem to remember any of these incidents. While Jared uses alcohol as a way of forgetting his problems and trying to feel better, this tactic only ends up pushing him further out of control.



Sarah's interest in Indigenous culture and politics ties into the environmentalist sentiments that the unnamed narrator expressed in Chapters 2 and 11. As she talks about fracking (oil and gas drilling) and the real-life Idle No More walk (which protests against environmental destruction), the book suggests that it's important to protect nature and to recognize how Native people, in particular, are leading that charge.



The fact that Crashpad also knows about and is attending the Idle No More protests suggests that this movement is broadly important, as multiple characters in the book are passionate about protecting the environment. The fact that this is a real-life protest movement also confirms that this is not just a fictional problem—environmental degradation has real stakes for all human beings.



As Jared gets to know Sarah better, it's clear that they have similarly sarcastic personalities, but Sarah's genuine sympathy reveals her kindness as well. Sarah bringing up Baby Killer also starts to link Jared's relationships with the two of them, as both are built on genuine affection.



Later, Sarah and Jared take a breather from making out and Sarah puts music on, dancing around the room in a white sports bra. Jared wraps himself in the sleeping bag, watching her as her skirt twirls and she sings along to the music. Soon after, Sarah's cell phone rings—it's Mrs. Jaks, checking up on Sarah. When Sarah tells Mrs. Jaks that she owns her own sexuality, Mrs. Jaks gets angry that they're having sex—she thought that Jared was a good boy.

After Sarah hangs up, she asks why Jared spends so much time with Mrs. Jaks. Jared explains that when his mom spent time in rehab and anger management (following the incident with David), Mrs. Jaks took him in. Jared doesn't mention that his mom also went to jail for a short period of time. Sarah asks if his dad is alive, but Jared changes the subject, asking how long Sarah is staying in Kitimat. Sarah says that she isn't sure that her mom ever wants her to come home, and she gets up to leave. Jared tells Sarah that he'll call her the next day, and she gives him her cell phone number because Mrs. Jaks listens in on the landline. She blows him a kiss and leaves.

Jared lies back, looking up at the **Darth Vader** poster on the ceiling. The POWDER HOUSE RULES thought bubble is coming unstuck from the ceiling, and a spiderweb now hangs off of it. Jared recalls how David was charged with assault for breaking Jared's ribs, but so was his mom, for nailing David to the floor and leaving him there. She might have gotten off if she played the helpless mother protecting her son, but she was very aggressive in court. After what happened, Mrs. Jaks told Jared to forgive David so that Jared could live without fear and pain; his mom, on the other hand, said that Jared had to be harder.

CHAPTER 18

The next morning, Jared texts his mom to ask if she's alive, but he doesn't get a response. She and Richie come back a few days later with a bucket of KFC and beer. She's thinner, and Jared asks where she was—he thought she might have died. His mom refuses to tell him, saying that he's acting like a baby. As they eat and watch TV, she wraps her arms around Jared and squeezes, saying, "I looooooove you." He asks her not to do anything that could kill her.

Jared and Sarah are both forced into situations that are beyond their maturity level as teenagers. Mrs. Jaks worries about Jared and Sarah having sex and wants to protect their innocence, but this is somewhat ironic, since Sarah and Jared's lives aren't particularly innocent or carefree. Both of them have to protect and take care of the adults in their lives.



Here, the book shows another way in which Jared and Sarah relate to each other. Not only do they both have a tendency to take responsibility for the adults in their lives, but they also receive love and care from the Jakses in a way that they don't from their biological parents. Sarah's uncertainty about whether or not her mom wants her at home isn't lost on Jared, who often feels abandoned by his mother.



The slow degradation of the Darth Vader poster reflects Jared's own coming of age—it's a gradual process, but each day, Jared seems to face a new problem and take on more adult responsibilities. Additionally, the contrast between Mrs. Jaks's and Jared's mom's advice here reflects the difference between Jared's relationships with the two women. Mrs. Jaks is a much more positive and supportive presence for Jared, as she tries to counsel him to move on and not hold onto anger. Jared's mother, on the other hand, implies that he should become emotionally hardened to the world and fuel that hardness with violence. But the fact that Jared's mom's violence left him without her for a period of time only emphasizes how using violence as an expression of love can be more harmful than helpful.



Just as Jared and his dad have reversed roles, Jared and his mom are starting to swap roles as well. Jared is asking his mother to be more responsible because she's failing in her duty to take care of herself or him, leaving him alone and unaware of where she is for several days. This is also what makes her love ring hollow, because she seems capable of abandoning him at any time.



The next morning, Jared checks the fridge, which is mostly empty. He thinks that he might have to do a bake sale soon, if he can figure out where to cook. Jared eats cereal, and as he returns downstairs, he sees Sarah walking up the street in a grey skirt and blazer, with red lipstick and pearls. She says that she's going to the Idle No More protest—if she wears “the clothes of the oppressor,” the police will let her call a lawyer in jail. Jared goes with her, taking the bus to the reserve. He's amazed that they've barely known each other more than a week. The day is sunny, and there are speeches and songs, but Jared only remembers Sarah's excited face and her fingers in his.

When Jared gets home, he finds the **basement** door kicked in, his furniture smashed, holes in the wall, and the mattress slashed. Richie texts him to stay with Blake—his mom is furious. Jared goes upstairs and finds his mom with bloody knuckles. She tells Jared that Destiny told her Jared was helping his dad. Jared's mom hurls a beer can at his head, and she calls him a “goddamn fucking disloyal piece of shit.” Jared walks out of the house, and his mom doesn't bother to follow him.

CHAPTER 19

Weeks later, Jared wakes up on a motel floor with Bambam, Dylan's hockey teammate. He still has his wallet, phone, and shoes, but he can't find his jacket. His phone battery is dead, and he has \$7.50 to his name. He goes to the bathroom and sees a large black L drawn on his forehead. Jared starts to remember how he got there: he stayed at Blake's for a week, and then with Kelsey for a few nights before returning to Blake's. He asked Dylan to stay at his place, but Mr. Wilkinson still had a grudge. They did attend a party together, and things got fuzzy from there.

After collecting his things, Jared looks outside: Dylan and Ebony are arguing in front of his truck. Ebony is crying, having just found Dylan with another girl. She hits him with her purse, and Jared decides to hitch a ride home to avoid the drama. He makes it to the edge of town by lunchtime, but no one has slowed down for him, and it's starting to drizzle. He doesn't know how to get home, and he hopes his mom can't stay mad at him forever. He thinks of staying with Nana Sophia, but he knows that would anger his mom even more.

Jared's thought that he might have to start baking again indicates that he feels he has to take responsibility for himself, because his mother isn't fulfilling the job of a parent to feed her child. Meanwhile, Sarah's reference to wearing the “clothes of the oppressor” also indicates how she feels she has to dress well (i.e., in a suit) to be treated well—when in reality, the purpose of the protest is simply to convince people to recognize the importance of protecting the environment.



In this moment, Jared's mother shows her violent side once again—except this time, she turns it on Jared. The fact that his mom uses verbal abuse and violence as a punishment in addition to an expression of love makes Jared feel that her love isn't truly unconditional, and that she can turn on him at any moment. Here, the trashed basement also reflects their relationship, showing how Jared's mom does not provide him with a safe, loving environment. As a result, the book illustrates, they experience a severe break in their relationship.



Jared's mother's anger and immaturity (directing her anger at Jared's dad toward Jared instead) forces Jared to grow up even more, as he has to figure out his own living situation when his home no longer feels safe. He also uses alcohol to escape his sadness and the hardship he is facing. However, this only causes Jared to essentially hit rock bottom, as he wakes up with little money, no means of communication, and nowhere to live. This again illustrates that drinking doesn't provide escape from hardship—it simply puts hardship off in the short term and exacerbates it in the long term.



The fact that Jared is more worried about what his mom would do if he went to Nana Sophia's than about being homeless speaks to how volatile their relationship is, as her threat of violence overpowers her love for him and his actual well-being. On the other hand, Jared knows that Nana Sophia would take him in without hesitation, demonstrating how her unconditional love and support is a much healthier dynamic.



Just then, a burgundy Caddy pulls onto the shoulder in front of Jared. An old Native woman smiles at him, but underneath her skin he can see something dark and twisting, with fangs. Jared thinks that he must have done mushrooms. When the old woman asks Jared where he's going, he says Kitimat. She offers to take him as far as Terrace, and he says that's perfect, but he can't make himself get into the car. The thing under the woman's skin snarls, and Jared quickly says that he forgot his phone and moves away from the car. His inner voice tells him to run, and he does so as the rain picks up.

When Jared gets back to the motel, his feet are sore, and his clothes are drenched. Dylan is drinking in his truck, and Jared asks if they can go home. He agrees, letting Jared into the driver's seat. Dylan puts country music on, and he sings about Ebony until they stop for gas on the way. Jared wrings out his clothes in the bathroom while Dylan buys a coke. When they get back into the car, Dylan has filled half the coke bottle with vodka. Jared asks Dylan if he saw him do acid the night before, but Dylan doesn't remember.

As Jared starts the car up, he notices the burgundy Caddy pull into the rest stop. Jared pulls the truck behind the Caddy, and his inner voice tells him to check on the old woman. Jared gets out of the truck and goes up to the car, peering through the darkness and rain. He wonders if the woman fell down or got hurt, but then Jared has a strange moment where he sees himself from someone else's perspective, as if from the bush nearby. Then Jared is back in his own head, and he is overwhelmingly tired. He doesn't want to couch surf anymore, so he thinks it might be time to go home.

Back at Jared's house, Jared tells Dylan that he'll call a cab for him. Dylan asks Jared to drive him back, but Jared doesn't want to hitch home, so Dylan staggers into the **basement** with Jared to stay the night. Jared notices that the wall and door have been fixed, and the broken furniture is gone. Dylan flops on the bed and calls Ebony, declaring his love for her. Jared goes to the bathroom to put on dry clothes and notices the L is still on his forehead. When Jared tells Dylan to stop drunk-dialing, Dylan says that he feels bad that Jared lives in this basement, and then he throws up.

Even though Jared can see something stirring underneath this Native woman's skin, his immediate impulse is to run away from it rather than to accept her help. As magic becomes more and more present in the story, Jared seems to feel that avoiding the beings that appear to him gives him greater control over the situation—even though avoiding them does not make them go away.



As Jared tries to rationalize the supernatural beings that begin to appear in his life by convincing himself that they're drug-induced hallucinations, the book again demonstrates how Jared's attempts to avoid his problems only end up hurting him. He can no longer distinguish what is based in reality and what might be caused by his drug use.



This incident illustrates that just because Jared is intent on avoiding the supernatural in his life, this doesn't mean that the supernatural will stop finding him. As he gets more and more panicked about the woman's presence and the visions of being in someone else's head, it's clear that Jared's attempts to avoid his problems are only making them worse.



Jared's first foray home in weeks perhaps suggests that his mom has forgiven him, as someone has cleaned up his basement. But the fact that she still hasn't reached out to Jared shows her immaturity: she is still giving him the silent treatment for helping his dad, while Jared was just trying to be responsible. There's also a notable difference between Dylan and Jared in this moment: while both are recovering from hangovers, Dylan is wrapped up in teenage drama, while Jared (whose problems are arguably more severe) is taking care of Dylan.



While Dylan continues to mumble about Ebony and being totally innocent of cheating, Jared thinks over the day, wondering if he's a little crazy for getting freaked out about an old woman. His inner voice tells him that he should lay off the alcohol, and Jared again wonders if he's hearing someone else's voice. Interrupting Jared's thoughts, Dylan again says that he loves Ebony—but Jared knows that Ebony isn't going to take Dylan back, just like Jared's mom will never think he's a good son.

Jared wakes up late and sees that Dylan has left without cleaning up his vomit. Jared mops up the puke and scrubs down the floor before checking his messages, noticing that Sarah texted him the night before. Jared texts her back, and she says that she's coming over. She arrives with a slice of moose meat pie and makes fun of Jared for the L on his forehead. When she asks why he hangs out with Dylan, Jared says that he does it for the free alcohol.

Wrapping her arms around Jared, Sarah confesses that she had a rough couple of weeks without him. Jared says that she can always stay at his place even when he's not home. Sarah tells him that it's pretty bleak in the **basement** without him, and he responds that he missed her, too. Rolling her eyes, Sarah tells him to can the corn.

CHAPTER 20

Human beings come with an instruction manual: genes. The difference between one person and another is one DNA base pair in every thousand. But human beings all have bodies made of meat, bodies which are transitory vessels built from recycled carbon. Bits of each person have probably been a cricket or a dinosaur. The narrator concludes by saying, "come closer and let me speak to the creatures that swim in your ancient oceans," or encoded memories that still lie in a person's blood and bones.

Seeing these visions worsens Jared's feeling of being out of control of his life, and as a result, he wants to avoid them. But Jared's inner voice also advises that he should lay off the alcohol, connecting Jared's lack of control over his life and his mind to his alcohol use. Tying both alcohol and magic together, the book suggests that it's better to confront one's problems rather than use escapism to avoid them (whether by taking drugs or by ignoring the situation altogether).



Jared's comment that he only hangs out with Dylan for the free booze makes sense—drinking with Dylan is a way for Jared to escape the responsibility of his everyday life. Yet, as this incident illustrates, avoiding his problems doesn't rid Jared of them—and sometimes it even creates more problems, like having to clean up after Dylan and endure his abuse. In this way, Sarah's question highlights the fact that drinking alcohol to avoid problems only defers those problems; it does not solve them.



As Sarah and Jared grow closer, they become more openly affectionate and begin to support each other through difficult times. Even under layers of sarcasm, their budding love is clear, and Sarah's support goes a long way in making Jared feel better about his problems.



This chapter, again told from the perspective of the unnamed narrator, highlights the connection between human beings and nature, noting that every person contains bits and pieces that were once a part of nature. In calling human bodies "transitory vessels," the passage also implies that people have a role to play in continuing Earth's history—in bringing ancient ocean creatures' memories to the present. This is an important contrast to how the book implies human beings are currently treating nature, as something disposable. This passage thus speaks to the importance of reconnecting with and protecting nature.



CHAPTER 21

In May, with little over a month of school left, Jared finds final bill notices in the mail. He sells the living room TV and calls the utility companies and the banks. He's not sure how long it's been since his mom has been home. He knows he can't call his dad—Jared helped Destiny move into a shelter with Ben, but Shirley wouldn't let his dad answer the phone when Jared calls anymore. And when he goes over to Mrs. Jaks's, she won't tell him where Sarah is.

Finally, Jared decides to message Nana Sophia, asking to stay with her for the summer. She says that she can buy him a plane ticket as soon as he finishes school and tells him she loves him. Jared knows that his mom will probably disown him for running off to Nana's, but his mom isn't even there. If he can't come up with the money to keep the house going, he'll leave.

That afternoon, the power goes out, even though Jared made a partial payment on the electricity. When he calls the utility company, they say that they'll reconnect it in a day or two. In the meantime, one of the tenants in the house moves out. Jared begs the others to help pay the bills, but they refuse and say that they'll give him a day or two for the power to go back on. Normally, this is the time of year when Jared and the Jakses turn over the soil in their garden, but this year everything feels shaky, and planning feels dangerous.

Jared goes to school early to shower there, grateful for the hot water. He has a pop quiz in science class and homework due in French, which he hasn't done. At lunch, Jared eats food he got from the food bank. He has no idea how to make the bills. After lunch, Sarah approaches Jared and greets him with a "Hadih," saying that she's decolonizing her language. She asks to stay over that night, and he says yes, even though the power is out. Sarah tells him that Mr. Jaks came back to the house for a week but almost killed himself in the garage—now he's back in respite care. Sarah asks Jared to skip class with her, and they wander down to a park and push each other on the swings. They kiss, and Jared can tell that she's been crying.

Over a month later, Jared still hasn't talked to his mom, and her and his dad's irresponsibility has forced even greater responsibility on Jared. Now, he has to be his own parent as well as Destiny's, worrying about making money and paying bills when he should be focused on school. The more they avoid their duties as parents, the more sacrifices Jared has to make in order to survive.



Nana Sophia represents a stark contrast to Jared's mother: she provides Jared with unconditional love in a way that Jared's mom doesn't, which is why Jared relies on Nana Sophia in his time of greatest crisis. Moreover, Nana Sophia is willing to take on responsibility so that Jared doesn't have to. This is the reverse of his relationship with his mom, as she abandons all responsibility and forces him to become independent at 16.



Jared's mother's absence forces Jared to worry about how to keep up his home for himself, as well as about how to keep up the house so that the tenants will stay. Jared's description of this year as "shaky" only underscores the chaotic position that his mother has left him in, despite the fact that he's still only a teenager. Jared has to take on the duties of a parent and a landlord, which is an example of how a dysfunctional home life can force children to take on enormous responsibility.



Like Jared, Sarah also provides some insight into how children from dysfunctional families may be forced to mature much faster than their peers. Sarah has to deal with the gravity of her grandfather almost killing himself, while Jared has to go to the food bank or shower at school for hot water because his mom has abandoned him. The challenges that Jared and Sarah face are juxtaposed with actions more typical of teenagers (like not doing homework or playing on a swing while skipping class), demonstrating how their normal duties as teenagers seem trivial in the face of their more adult responsibilities.



Back in the **basement**, Jared and Sarah build a fort and light it up with a battery-powered lantern. Jared lights a joint while Sarah puts a blot of LSD on her tongue. Jared refuses, saying that he has bad trips, and he smokes pot instead. Placing his hand on her rear end, Sarah asks Jared to spank her, but he refuses, saying that it's not his thing. She suggests that she could tie him up, saying that she's bored of making out, but Jared again says no.

Just then, Jared notices a web of lines on Sarah's inner thighs. When he asks who made them, she says that she did. As Jared feels the high in waves, he tells Sarah that his mom dated a guy named David who broke his ribs when Jared got poor grades—David got an erection when Jared started screaming. Sarah flinches, saying that's messed up. She curls into Jared, explaining that she's numb all the time and just wants to feel something. Jared says that he doesn't want to hurt her or be hurt. When Sarah asks what happened to David, Jared explains that his mom nailed David's feet to the floor.

Sarah says that Jared is crackling like an electric guitar being tuned. She says she knows where Jared is all the time because she can hear him. Looking at him, Sarah says that he's glowing and that she can see his bones—like an X-ray. Jared giggles and says that she's wasted. Sarah makes sounds like a lightsaber, pointing out the **Darth Vader** poster on the ceiling.

Later, Sarah straddles Jared, showing him new cuts on her arm that she made while he was sleeping. He isn't sure how to react to this, so he just nods. Sarah starts to cut herself with a knife in front of him, daring him to say something. Jared is weirded out but doesn't know what to do, and Sarah starts to get lost in the cutting, as if he isn't there.

Sarah again asks to tie Jared up, saying that they can just pretend using a headband. Jared says no, but when Sarah tells him she can pull a zipper down with his teeth, Jared gets an erection and grows more interested. She cuts into the couch cushion with the knife and threads the headband through, tying Jared's wrists up. She kisses him down his throat and chest. But when she licks his ribs, Jared's erection sags. He stares at the ceiling, noticing that **Darth Vader** lost his thought bubble.

While Sarah is eager to bring violence into her and Jared's relationship for greater excitement, Jared's hesitation to spank Sarah or have her tie him up demonstrates his uneasiness with mixing violence and love.



Here, Jared reveals the final piece of his backstory with David, which provides further context as to why Jared is so uncomfortable with mixing violence and affection. David's abuse also involved sexual arousal in a way that was confusing and emotionally painful for Jared. So, whereas Sarah wants to mix sex and violence as a way to make their relationship more intimate, this idea makes Jared uncomfortable because of his past trauma.



Jared continues to dismiss any possibility of magic in his life, instead choosing to believe that drugs are the culprit in Sarah's visions. This passage also reinforces the idea that Sarah and Jared use drugs to escape their problems and to feel like they have more control over their lives, when in reality, it only pushes them further out of control.



In addition to Sarah's desire for violence in their sexual relationship making Jared uncomfortable, her self-harm worries him as well. Sarah seems to use cutting herself as a way to control her body or make herself feel something, when in reality, it only hurts her.



While some of what Sarah is saying arouses Jared, it's nonetheless clear that he finds mixing violence and affection uncomfortable. When she licks his ribs, he loses interest, likely because it triggers the memory of David breaking his ribs in the past. Instead, Jared seems drawn to warm love that's uncomplicated by violence (like what he experiences in his relationship with Nana Sophia). It's also notable that Jared looks at Darth Vader in this moment and notices that the poster has lost its thought bubble. The poster has been an ongoing symbol of Jared's innocence, so this slow decay reflects Jared's own loss of innocence as he becomes more involved in adult relationships and responsibilities.



Sarah unzips Jared's jeans with her teeth and pulls his pants down, and his erection springs free. She kisses slowly up his thighs and then starts to suck on his penis. Jared's erection becomes painful, and he starts to moan as she lowers her mouth, embarrassed to sound like that. He says, "I don't know, Sarah," and she sits up as they pant. She tries to kiss him, but he turns his head away from her, asking her to get off of him. She jokes around with him and he laughs, losing his train of thought as she strokes him.

Later, Sarah tells Jared that her uncles are driving down to help her care for Mrs. Jaks. Her mom never talks about that side of the family—her mom is embarrassed about being Native and tells people they're Spanish. Sarah's mom also says that she wasn't meant to be a mother. Jared says that his mom thinks he's weak and probably isn't coming back.

Sarah then goes to get a can of frosting and Sesame Street cookie decorations that Jared got from the food bank. She tells Jared to close his eyes, and when he opens them, she's naked on the cushions with frosting and decorations on her crotch. She starts to sing "C is for Cookie," and Jared collapses in laughter. Jared says that he thinks he loves her, and Sarah retorts, "You'd say anything to get laid."

CHAPTER 22

Jared puts \$20 on his phone plan and uses the rest of his savings to pay the electricity bill. It's been four months since Jared's mom has talked to him and five weeks since she's been home. One of the tenants comes back with a pot roast and other groceries, but Jared has to call Sarah to see if she has a cookbook with a pot roast recipe, because he no longer has internet service at home. He can hear Sarah and Mrs. Jaks bickering on the other side, until the phone abruptly cuts off.

Dylan comes to Jared's door and asks him to take a road trip with him. Jared refuses, reminding Dylan that he threw up on Jared's floor, left without cleaning it up, and complains about Ebony all the time. Jared says that he's sick of Dylan making himself feel better by looking down on Jared. Jared says that it must be nice having his mom and dad clean up his messes, and Dylan curses at Jared, leaving just as Sarah shows up.

This scene illustrates Jared's unsettled feelings about violence in his sex life with Sarah. Even though he gets pleasure from sex, that pleasure is complicated by the fact that his past experience with David has given him negative associations with being trapped on a bed. Thus, the book illustrates how mixing violence and love in this way can be confusing and painful.



Sarah and Jared's reflections illustrate how their mothers have made their children more responsible because they avoid their parental duties. Jared is currently keeping up the house by himself, while Sarah's mother has sent her to the Jakses to take care of both herself and her grandparents.



This moment contrasts with Jared being tied up earlier. Whereas mixing love and violence made him uncomfortable and uncertain, here the warm, playful affection between Sarah and him buoys Jared so much that he almost tells Sarah that he loves her. In this way, the book suggests that warm affection provides a healthier foundation for a relationship than violent passion.



Again, Jared is forced to deal with adult problems that teenagers don't typically have to worry about. In addition to keeping up the house in his mother's absence, Jared has to figure out how to pay for his phone and cook dinners for himself and his tenants. In this way, his mom's negligence forces him to essentially become his own parent, the breadwinner of the household, and a landlord who's responsible for the tenants.



Jared's troubled home life has made him different from peers like Dylan. Because Dylan has his parents to help solve up his problems, he acts more immaturely (he's able to focus on his breakup all the time, and he doesn't feel responsible for his own messes). Jared, however, has a dysfunctional family, and dealing with this has forced him to deal with much more serious problems and gain more maturity as a result.



Sarah gives Jared the cookbook, earmarking the pot roast recipe with a condom. She jokes that Dylan likes Jared—he’s probably close to pulling Jared’s zipper down with his teeth. Jared asks her to not be a pervert. Sarah says that she doesn’t know why she’s attracted to Jared, because she doesn’t believe in monogamy, it’s clear that he finds her behavior “pervy,” and she’s usually attracted to people who don’t adhere to gender binaries. Jared gets confused, asking if that means she’s gay, or bisexual, or trans, and Sarah gets annoyed that Jared doesn’t understand her and leaves. The house is quiet, and Jared thinks that if he left, no one would miss him. But he tells himself to stop moping, and he starts on the pot roast.

That night, Jared’s mom returns. Jared stays in the **basement**, both relieved and nervous as he hears a party going on upstairs. Later, he wakes to find his mom at the foot of his bed. She’s shaking, and her pupils are dilated. Jared apologizes, and his mom says that he isn’t sorry—but he will be.

*Jared’s exchange with Sarah contrasts with Dylan’s problems with **Ebony**: while Dylan talks about his relationship drama all the time, Jared quickly brushes off his argument with Sarah because he has bigger problems to focus on. Jared’s thought that he could simply leave, and no one would miss him, again points to how little support and stability he has in his life. But the fact that Jared simply tells himself to stop moping and continues to take care of the house indicates that he doesn’t even have the luxury of running away from his life.*



Jared’s mom’s return only emphasizes the contrast between them: she’s been acting as a teenager, while he’s taken on the role of an adult. She took out her anger on Jared unnecessarily, left behind all of her responsibilities, and used drugs (implied by the shaking and dilated pupils) to avoid her problems. And, as a result of her irresponsibility, Jared was forced to be his own parent.



CHAPTER 23

Jared’s mom refuses to leave his **room**, and he can’t go back to sleep with her staring at him, so he hitches a ride to George’s house for a *Doctor Who* marathon. Jared can tell George’s mom isn’t thrilled that he’s there; she tells him that she knows how much money is in her son’s piggy bank. Around season three of *Doctor Who*, Jared drifts into sleep.

Suddenly, there’s banging on the front door, and Jared hears Dylan singing about **Ebony**. Heading downstairs and outside, Jared helps Dylan sit down. Dylan explains that **Ebony** is dating **Bambam**, and Jared sits in silence with him for a while. Then, Mr. Wilkinson appears and collects Dylan, while Jared assures Dylan that they can talk in the morning. George’s mom appears at the door, saying that Dylan is spiraling and that he picks on George. Jared says that they’re all spiraling, and he assures her that he won’t let Dylan pick on George.

Even though Jared is relieved that his mom has returned, her threat of violence makes his environment so uncomfortable that he still wants to avoid her, so he goes over to George’s house. In Jared’s times of greatest need, he relies on the relationships in his life that are based on warmth and kindness rather than the ones based in violent passion.



George’s mom’s comment that Dylan is spiraling again hints at the idea that the characters in the novel who drink—like Dylan—use alcohol as a coping mechanism. But abusing substances in this way only causes them to “spiral” out of control. Jared even affirms that he, too, is spiraling out of control, as he acknowledges the harm that comes from trying to avoid one’s problems using alcohol and drugs.



In the morning, Jared helps George's mom make lunch on the porch—salmon fillets. He cuts the fish and splits firewood for their barbecue pit. After they start to roast the fish over the pit, George and his mom go inside to get cleaning supplies. Suddenly, some crows, who have been watching the scene, ask Jared for the fish guts. Jared freezes in shock, and they criticize him as a “typical raven” who loves humans and is greedy. Jared pinches himself and thinks that he has to lay off the alcohol and marijuana for a few days.

Again, rather than confront the magic in his life, Jared continues to rationalize it by telling himself that the talking crows are a hallucination brought on by drugs and alcohol. He does so in order to avoid worrying about it, even though he knows that he's awake and he hasn't had anything to drink in the past day. Meanwhile, the crows call Jared a “typical raven,” which hints at Jared's connection to the trickster raven Wee'git.



CHAPTER 24

At school the next day, Jared sits with George and Sarah at lunch. The two of them get into a long argument about the best companions in *Doctor Who*, but Jared isn't really engaged. After school, his mom drives up and tells him to get in. Jared does, but he leaves his seat belt off. Jared's mom tells him that she doesn't deserve this treatment from him, and Jared asks if she remembers what she said to him in his **room**. They sit in silence for the rest of the way home.

The fact that Jared isn't engaged in the conversation about a TV show underscores how he's focused on more mature issues than his peers—namely, he's preoccupied with how to deal with his mother. Even leaving his seatbelt off in the car hints at the fact that Jared understands she could be violent with him at any time, so he might need to make an escape.



Jared tries to go to the **basement** when they get home, but his mom makes him bacon and eggs, so he stays upstairs. As Jared eats, he explains that he didn't want his dad to be homeless while he was cut off disability. His mom says that she hates Phil and points out that he was playing Jared. Jared asks if that's why she abandoned him for months and left him to pay the bills. His mom says that it was all she could do not to strangle Jared, to which Jared replies, “that's love.”

Jared recognizes that because his mother uses violence as a punishment, the way she also mixes violence and love is deeply unsettling for him. His sarcastic comment that not strangling him is “love” suggests that her violent tendencies make him skeptical about whether or not she really loves him.



As Jared and his mom do the dishes together, Sarah pops in. She greets Jared's mom and tells a bad joke about a cow, and Jared's mom gets annoyed because she thinks that Sarah is calling her a cow. Sarah nervously asks for the cookbook back, and Jared gives it to her. Jared's mom tells him that he better be using condoms with Sarah, calling her crazy. Jared tells his mom that Sarah was kicked out of her house, acknowledging that Jared's mom was kicked out of her house too. Jared's mom replies that she was alone and had to make her own way, but Jared points out that Sarah is taking care of her dying grandmother—everyone has issues.

Here, Jared acknowledges that his mom's dysfunctional family caused her to grow up in certain ways, as she had to work and pay her own bills as a teenager. And yet, even though she gained some responsibility, she did not learn how to take care of others in her life (like Jared) and has maintained a teenage lifestyle well into her adulthood. As a result, Jared has to learn to take care of himself when his mom is unable to. This suggests that while a dysfunctional family can cause people to grow up more quickly than they would otherwise, it doesn't prevent them from also making mistakes and continuing that dysfunctional dynamic.



Jared's mom presses her forehead against his, and he asks her where she went while she was away. She hugs him but doesn't say anything. The next day, they get two new tenants at the house, and dinner turns into a party. Jared goes downstairs, not feeling like faking a good time. His mom texts him a picture of himself, captioned “Kill n die.”

Jared's mom tries to show her love for him through some warmth and affection. But her later implication that she would “kill n die” for him—hearkening back to the earlier incident of running over Richie's dogs with her car—shows that she still uses violence as a way to express love.



CHAPTER 25

Jared dreams about killer whales flying through the ocean, and then suddenly he is on a fishing boat with the old Native woman who tried to pick him up in her car. He asks her what the monster is underneath her skin, but she tells him that it's magic, and that it gets frustrated because she doesn't let her magic loose. She tells Jared that she will see him in a day or so, and then she smiles at him and leaves.

Still in the dream, Jared watches the orcas over the boat railing as they hunt. He says aloud that this is very creepy, and the orcas tell him that they're trying to hunt. Jared says that he doesn't know if he's going crazy or not, and the orcas reply that it's not all about him—they don't come in and mess up *his* hunt.

The next day, Jared tries to tell George and Sarah that he had a crazy dream, but Sarah interrupts and tells him that she's not the kind of girlfriend who will listen to his sex dreams about hot actresses. Jared is surprised that she admits she's his girlfriend, and she replies that she's only dating him until she can find someone more politically aware. Jared asks if she's referring to Idle No More, explaining he thought that protest was over. In response, Sarah glares at him and says that she's close to beating him up, and George agrees that Jared's comment was uncalled for.

CHAPTER 26

Back at Jared's house, the place is sparkling clean. Jared looks for his mom, who is sitting on her bed, plucking her eyebrows into a thin line. He warns her that if she keeps plucking, she'll pull her skin out, but his mom says that she's itchy and can feel things crawling in her hair. Jared asks her what she's on, and when he reaches to take the tweezers from her, she stabs at his hand so hard that she breaks his skin. Then, she returns to plucking. Jared sits with her until he can't watch anymore, and then he goes out for a walk. Sitting on a bench, Jared listens to his heartbeat and to the blood coursing in his body.

The old woman hints at the idea that ignoring magic can cause problems, like the monster under her skin growing restless. This relates to the book's broader implication that avoiding one's problems—whether magical or not—only exacerbates them.



Jared's belief that he is going crazy again highlights how magic makes him feel out of control, and as such, he tries to avoid it. Additionally, the whales point out that Jared is ruining their hunt, which ties back to the unnamed narrator's points about humanity's arrogance and destruction of the natural world. Their reaction sends the message that people should be more considerate of the other creatures around them.



This exchange implies that those who believe that fighting for environmental protection can be achieved with a singular event (as Jared does here) are mistaken. Both George and Sarah emphasize that the Idle No More movement isn't something that happens once—it's something that requires ongoing engagement to help protect nature from human destruction.



Here, Jared's mom continues to use drugs to cope with her ongoing problems—but as a result, she creates even further harm by lashing out at Jared when he tries to help her. This again shows how violence undermines loving relationships rather than supporting them. Even though Jared's mom uses violence to protect him, this is another example of how that violence can quickly turn on him instead.



CHAPTER 27

In French class, Jared's inner voice gets a sudden urge for pizza, even though Jared doesn't have any money. After school, he walks to the Pizzarama as though he has no control over his feet, and he sees the old Native woman with the monster hiding beneath her skin. Jared feels stoned, though he knows he's not. The woman tells him that her name is Jwa'sins and comments that Jared must be very special, because she normally doesn't share dreams with humans.

Jwa'sins offers Jared a pizza, but he eyes it suspiciously. She assures him that she's not a witch, and Jared asks if she can read his thoughts. She says no, but that he gets very noisy when he's upset or excited. She then tells Jared a story about a shaman with two sons. The older son wanted to be a shaman in the worst way, and so he went to the forest and cleansed himself, eating no food and poisoning himself—but no spirits came to him.

Jwa'sins goes on: the younger son wanted nothing to do with magic. He didn't want his father's lonely life, the fasting, or the blame that everyone piled on him when someone fell sick. But the spirits still flocked to the son, torturing him until he gave in and became a powerful shaman. Jared tells Jwa'sins that he didn't want to come here, but she says that it was his curiosity that brought him here—not her. She asks if he sees spirits, but he says that he hasn't—they aren't real, and he doesn't believe in magic.

Jared then asks what happened to the older son, and Jwa'sins says that he starved to death and haunted his brother, and then the brothers had a magical battle that killed them both. Jwa'sins gives Jared her phone number in case he ever sees a ghost—she can be his guide. She says goodbye to Jared and tells him it was lovely meeting him. Jared wonders how he knew she would be there, and his inner voice assures him that it's just a strange coincidence. It quickly becomes clear to Jared that Jwa'sins was the old woman in his dream, and she came to find out if he saw ghosts—but this is a bizarre and unsettling prospect. He wants to forget what happened, but his inner voice tells him that he played Jwa'sins just right.

The magical elements in Jared's life are becoming harder and harder to ignore. Not only does magic take control over his thoughts and actions, but Jwa'sins also tells him that he's not entirely human. Still, Jared explains Jwa'sins away by telling himself that she's a drug-induced hallucination. Rather than trying to understand and confront the magic in his life, he tries to rationalize it away or ignore it.



Jwa'sins's story about the shaman's sons is symbolic: the two sons represent Sarah and Jared. The older son represents Sarah, who tries to relate to her spirituality in any way that she can—even if it means hurting or poisoning herself, as she does when she cuts herself or uses drugs.



The second son symbolizes Jared, as he tries to avoid any involvement in magic or spirituality whatsoever. But the book implies that avoiding one's problems—both in the shaman story and in Jared's life—only winds up torturing a person, as those problems gradually worsen when one ignores them instead of dealing with them directly.



The ending of the shaman story hammers home the idea that trying to avoid one's problems or use unhealthy coping mechanisms results in disaster, foreshadowing the problems that will befall Jared for continuing to ignore the magical world around him. This again suggests that it's best to address problems head on.



CHAPTER 28

When Jared gets home, he is still weirded out by his afternoon with Jwa'sins, but he gets distracted by a message from Nana Sophia, who will be back from Europe soon. She tells Jared that she's counting the days until he gets there, that she'll have a **room** ready for him, and that she loves him. Meanwhile, Jared hasn't gotten any text messages from his mom. He hasn't gone upstairs in days and wonders if she'd even notice if he left. He realizes that he just isn't as important to her as whatever drugs she's on.

The next morning, Jared watches Mr. Jaks wander down the street in his pajamas. He helps Mr. Jaks back to his house, and Sarah greets them on the porch. Inside, Jared sees Mrs. Jaks in a lump on the couch, asleep, and so Jared helps Mr. Jaks shave, wash his dentures, and change clothes. Afterwards, Sarah makes coffee while Jared scrambles eggs and fries sausages. Once they're done eating, Jared and Mr. Jaks turn the soil over together before going inside and watching the news.

When Mr. Jaks and Mrs. Jaks are both asleep, Sarah explains that Mrs. Jaks is going back to Vancouver for more chemotherapy next week. Mr. Jaks is also going back into respite care, so Sarah will be at the house alone. Sarah hasn't slept in days, so Jared changes to the Weather Channel and lets Sarah fall asleep next to him. He yearns to stay in this quiet moment, with everyone calm and safe.

Early the next morning, Jared's mom texts him that she has a bad hangover. Jared doesn't want to care about his mom anymore, and he ignores her. His mom continues to text him, however, and Richie even texts him to text his mom back. Jared wants to stay with Sarah, but watching Mr. Jaks and Mrs. Jaks slowly dying is brutal. He wants to believe that his mom is sorry, but his dad always says he's sorry and still does bad things. Mostly, Jared doesn't want to be played, and he doesn't want to be alone.

Jared scrolls through a bunch of texts from his mom and Richie. Richie's texts relay that Richie's brother was a meth addict who shot Richie for his money. He came to visit Richie in the hospital and stole his wallet and sneakers. Richie's family thinks he called the cops on his brother, but he didn't. He says that Jared shouldn't step out on his family in this way.

The room that Nana Sophia has prepared for Jared contrasts with what Jared's mom did to his basement room. These different environments represent the very different relationships that Jared has with his grandmother and mother: his mom often tempers her love with violence, while Nana Sophia offers Jared a safe and comfortable space that reflects the affection in their relationship. In addition, the book again highlights the problems with using drugs as a coping mechanism, as doing so leads Jared's mother to completely neglect him.



Even as Jared's own life is growing more and more chaotic, he still has a deep-seated impulse to help the Jakses in whatever way he can. Because his and Sarah's own families have been so absent, they're forced to act as parents. In this case, that means feeding and caring for the Jakses and keeping up the house.



This moment of calm for Jared and Sarah demonstrates how their families' problems have put a huge amount of weight and responsibility on their shoulders. At this point, something as simple as falling asleep on the couch while watching TV is a rare luxury.



All of Jared's problems come to a head here: he's juggling his parents' drug addictions, caring for his dying neighbors, and trying to build stable relationships. All of this shows how compounded and weighty Jared's problems are, in contrast to the simpler problems that other teenagers face.



Richie's texts emphasize how using drugs to escape one's problems—like his brother does—only worsens those problems, which is what happens to Jared's mom as well. And because of his mom's addiction, Jared feels the weight of repairing his relationship with her—another way in which her issues have burdened him.



Meanwhile, Jared's mom explains that she's turning into her mother, Anita. When Anita was little, she got tuberculosis, and the nuns Anita lived with sent her to a sanatorium, putting her in a body cast and starving her. She's only alive because the sanatorium lost funding and shut down. Anytime Jared's mom sniffled growing up, Anita brought out the bleach and prayed constantly. Jared's mom's sister left when she turned 16, leaving his mom alone with Anita, and Anita immediately wrote her off as a "whore." She says that she never wanted Jared to feel like he had to run away from her.

Anita and Jared's mother's backstory sheds light on his mother's new impulse to clean the house, as Anita's trauma led her to clean the house (seemingly as a way of feeling more in control of her environment). But while Jared's mom ran away from her mother and gained some responsibility for herself, she realizes that she is repeating this cycle with Jared. She is pushing Jared away and causing him to take on more responsibility, in the same way that her mom pushed her away as well. In both cases, a dysfunctional parent forced their child to grow up quickly.



After reading his mom's texts, Jared texts Nana Sophia, asking about Jared's mom's sister. Nana Sophia sends him a link to an article that his aunt Mavis wrote—Mavis is a writer and published an essay about searching for Jared's mom during one of Jared's mom's relapses. Nana Sophia explains that Mavis is one of Jared's mom's triggers, so she never brought it up. Then, Jared receives two more texts: one from Richie cursing at Jared and telling him to text his mom, and one from his mom saying over and over that she loves him.

Here, Jared's mom reaches a turning point, realizing that the way she's been treating Jared isn't an effective way of maintaining a relationship with him—which is why she's trying to express her love for him in a more straightforward way. This speaks to the idea that relationships founded on love and affection are stronger and healthier than those in which love is implied or mixed up with violence.



When Jared goes back home, he lies in bed with his mom under her covers. She's shaking, and she doesn't have any eyebrows. Smoking a cigarette, she tells Jared that she's not going to do any more drugs that turn her into her mother. Just then, Richie comes back with whiskey for Jared's mom. When Richie starts unbuttoning his shirt, Jared gets up. Before he leaves, Jared's mom tells him that she loves him, and he says he loves her, too.

Jared's mom finally begins to recognize how using drugs to escape her problems is only creating more difficult ones, particularly in damaging her relationship with Jared. Here, she's trying to show more affection, perhaps to make up for stabbing him with the tweezers earlier. This again reinforces that relationships built on open and warm expressions of love are healthier than those that involve violence.



CHAPTER 29

The next morning, Sarah's uncles are due to arrive, and Jared goes over to the Jakses'. Mrs. Jaks starts to prepare the kitchen—Sarah's uncles are bringing a moose for her to cook—while Sarah observes the proceedings in disgust. Jared helps get the smoker and vacuum sealer out for Mrs. Jaks and sharpens knives. Mrs. Jaks soon falls asleep, and Sarah paces, worried that her relatives aren't going to like her. Jared says that if they don't, it doesn't matter.

It's unclear why Sarah's uncles are visiting, but it could be that they're coming to help care for her grandparents. If this is the case, it would take some of the burden off of Sarah, who is, of course, only a teenager. Because of Sarah's mom's inability to care for her parents herself, Sarah (and Jared) were forced into that adult role.



Sarah kisses Jared, and her hands start to travel, but Mrs. Jaks wakes and says that she can't sleep through their noise. Sarah reminds her grandmother to take her pills—and just then, they hear a car arrive. Sarah's uncle Doug, a tall, chubby Native guy, comes in, greeting Sarah warmly as she laughs in excitement and telling Mrs. Jaks to stop dieting. Another guy comes in along with two women, asking if Sarah and Jared can help unload the moose.

That night, after everyone is asleep, Sarah knocks on Jared's **basement** door. She brings magic mushrooms, but Jared says that he'd rather stick to booze and marijuana. After Sarah and Jared have sex, she asks if she can shave his head, and he agrees. Sarah says that her uncles want the Jakses to live with them, and when she asks if Jared would visit her, Jared again says yes. Suddenly, Sarah says that Jared has fireflies around him in a swarm—but Jared can't see anything, and he figures she's just tripping. Sarah says that she used to see the fireflies when she was falling asleep, but her mom sent her to a shrink. She interrupts her own story to marvel at the fireflies, whom she says are traveling through time and space and singing.

Sarah leans in to hear the song as Jared sips a beer. Noticing the fresh cuts on Sarah's arm, he covers them with Polysporin and lays beside her. When he looks up, **Darth Vader** is gone, and he wonders how he missed the poster's disappearance. Sarah says that there is no end to time. She wishes Jared could see what she sees, pressing her palm to his forehead. He notices that one of her cuts has opened and dripped blood on his face. She asks for the knife, but he refuses to give it to her while she's wasted.

While Jared wipes away the blood, Sarah says that Jared is hers, "now and forever." Jared wishes that people could make declarations of love to him when they weren't high or crazy. Sarah covers Jared's eyes with her hands, and suddenly, the ceiling disappears. Jared sees nothing but sky and a swarm of fireflies, and around him is a wasteland with boulders and mud. He thinks that he must be dreaming, and he insists to himself that he wake up. Suddenly, he sees a naked man with a necklace of bones coming toward them and hissing.

Sarah's uncles' arrival brings a parental kind of warmth and affection into her life, something that she's lacked thus far in the book. Because Sarah has been cut off from her uncles for so long, she isn't used to the type of kindness and support that they're seemingly willing to offer her, just as Jared has few people in his life who are constantly caring and supportive. But Sarah's excitement at her uncle's greeting shows how she, like Jared, values a warm and loving relationship.



Here, Sarah's connection to the magical realm becomes even more evident, but Jared again dismisses anything supernatural by using the excuse that Sarah is just high. It's clear that Sarah's mom dismissed her magical abilities as well, believing that she had some kind of mental illness—and seeing a psychiatrist ultimately led to Sarah losing her ability to engage with her magic. Sarah's consequent desperation to regain that connection illustrates that trying to avoid one's problems doesn't make them go away—in fact, it usually just makes them worse.



The Darth Vader poster's disappearance is symbolic, as it represents a loss of innocence for Jared. Just as Darth Vader slowly decayed and disappeared without Jared really noticing, Jared's maturation was also gradual in a way that Jared didn't fully recognize. But the responsibilities that his parents forced on him have led him to essentially become an adult—he cares for adults and kids around him, and he's taken on responsibilities of a homeowner—even though he is only 16 years old.



Jared again illustrates his discomfort with mixing love and violence. Sarah tries to make her declaration of love after cutting herself, almost as if she's making some kind of blood pact or sacrifice. But to Jared, this isn't a proper substitute for warm affection, because he knows that she's also distorting her mind with the psychedelic mushrooms. Additionally, Jared continues to brush off the magic around him by convincing himself that he is in a dream. But trying to do so does not protect him from the ape men coming toward them, suggesting that trying to avoid confusing or stressful situations isn't an effective coping strategy.



The fireflies sink down from the sky, their swarm humming like an electric amplifier. Sarah stands, lifting her arms as blood streams down her skin. The naked man crawls along the ground like an ape, and more ape men gallop toward her and Jared. When the fireflies touch Sarah's hand, her skin starts to shred off like she's made of smoke, and Jared tries to wake himself up.

Jared continues trying to convince himself he's dreaming, hoping that this will allow Sarah and him to escape from this alternate dimension. Yet this only makes Jared feel even more out of control, as Sarah now seems in danger of disintegrating completely. In this way, the book implies that the best way to control one's problems is to address them directly rather than attempting to avoid them.



CHAPTER 30

The next day, Jared is avoiding the **basement**, so he goes to the living room and turns on the Weather Channel. He tries to convince himself that he just had a bad trip, but his inner voice reminds him that he didn't take any mushrooms. Suddenly, a hand comes through the floor, and the man with the finger bone necklace pulls himself up from the basement. Jared tries to ignore it as he watches a house lift up from its foundation on a TV show about tornadoes.

Even after being transported—and even as his inner voice knows that he didn't take psychedelic mushrooms—Jared still tries to convince himself that he's imagining things. Yet trying to ignore the problem only makes it worse, as the ape men follow him into the living room. Jared's new visions of the ape men are aptly reflected in what Jared is watching. The reference to the flying house alludes to The Wizard of Oz, in which Dorothy was transported to a completely magical world—just as Jared is now experiencing a new, magical dimension as well.



As more hands scabble through the floor, Jared's inner voice tells him that he's being too loud, and that this is dangerous when Jared doesn't know what he's doing. The ape man swipes at Jared, but his hand goes right through him, and more ape men fill the living room. Jared continues to assure himself that they're not real—he and Sarah kissed after she had mushrooms, which altered his brain. Suddenly, something bangs the living room window, and Jared approaches it in time to see something small skitter into the bushes. The ape men go silent and return to the **basement**, and Jared worries about what could scare them.

The more Jared tries to deny that what is going on around him is real, the "louder" he gets. Throughout the novel, many people have referenced the fact that Jared is very noisy, and his ignorance of magic and lack of control seems to make this worse. The escalating danger from Jared's lack of control is clear here, as he attracts other beings that scare even the large ape men. This suggests that avoiding problems—like one's magical powers—can only add to those problems, increase chaos, and deprive a person of control.



Later, when Jared is asleep, a voice whispers that Jared's mom is hurt, and Jared snaps his eyes open. It's dark in the **basement**, and Jared can still see the ape men huddled in the corner. Jared, remaining very still, wishes that all of these weird things would stop happening. Suddenly, Jared hears a dog bark—Baby Killer's bark. He hears her pawing at the door, but he knows that it can't be Baby, because he buried her himself. He wants so badly to go to her, but he knows it's not Baby. He texts his mom asking if she's okay.

Jared is upset in this moment because of what Baby's relationship meant to him. He valued her and still misses her deeply because she represented the kind of warm, unconditional love that Jared rarely gets from other people.



When the sun rises, Baby stops barking. Jared opens the door and sees Baby's paw prints alongside smaller claw prints there. He goes upstairs to his mom's room, and the ape men follow Jared silently, still scared from the night before. Jared asks if she heard a dog last night, but she says no. Then, Jared's mom notices that he's tucked the gun his mom gave him into his belt, and she gives him a holster to make it less obvious. She tells him not to hesitate when he draws his gun.

By strapping the gun to himself, Jared seems to acknowledge how out of control and dangerous the magic occurrences in his life have become. As a result, he's finally willing to use violence to defend himself from this unknown danger. This again reinforces how avoiding problems has resulted in Jared having to take extreme actions to protect himself, suggesting that instead of denying what was happening, he should have dealt with it directly to avoid getting to this point.



CHAPTER 31

Some cultures believe that the universe exists on the back of a turtle. Others describe the dark star at the center of the galaxy as Kali, an Odin-eating wolf, or a massive black star. This black hole collects space and time into a singularity, and it becomes a door to other universes. People can't travel from a three-dimensional universe to a nine-dimensional one—it's like pouring out a glass of apple juice into an ocean. Universes are usually very separate, unless you are a Trickster.

The image of the world existing on the back of a turtle derives from Hindu, Chinese, and Indigenous North American mythology. This idea again reinforces how human spirituality and mythology often involve a deep connection to nature. The references to Kali (the Hindu destroyer goddess) and Fenrir (the wolf in Norse mythology that can eat worlds) are different ways of depicting the chaos at the center of our universe—or the black hole, as the chapter notes, which connects all of time and space.



CHAPTER 32

At school the next day, Dylan sits with Jared (who is still being followed by the ape men) at lunch, and Dylan complains about his parents being unhappy that he quit hockey. Jared assures them that they'll get over it—at least he's not torturing cats or holding up gas stations. Dylan gives Jared his sandwich and wonders what he should do with his life. When Jared suggests crocheting, Dylan grabs him in a headlock. Dylan asks where Sarah is, but Jared just shrugs the question off. Dylan leaves, and the ape men sniff around Jared's food. Watching them, Jared worries that he's really wrecked his brain.

Despite all of the evidence Jared has that magic has infiltrated his life (the dream in the basement, the ravens speaking to him, and the ape men following him), he still refuses to confront reality. And while Jared continues to think that he should no longer rely on drugs, in reality, he is still using drugs as an excuse to avoid confronting the reality of magic in his life.



When Jared gets back from school, his mom is burning sweetgrass and cedar in the house. Nana Sophia texts Jared with a picture of the **room** she set up for him—a sunlit room overlooking the ocean. It's very nice, but Jared is anxious about going to stay there. Things are better between him and his mom now that she's off meth, and the ape guys aren't that bad—he thinks that maybe they're just a reflection of his feelings. Jared and Nana Sophia say "I love you" and sign off.

The room that Nana Sophia prepares for Jared once again reflects the love in their relationship: Jared's grandmother is providing a safe and comforting space, which reflects the comfort and safety in their relationship. By contrast, his mom destroyed Jared's space in her house, an action that reinforces the volatility of their relationship. Still, Jared is hesitant to write his mom off completely, because he recognizes that her drug use influenced her behavior. Now that she is avoiding drugs and is actually confronting her reality rather than escaping from it, the problems between them have eased.



For dinner that night, Jared's mom makes Cup-a-Soup, and they watch the news together. When he tells her that he's going to see Sarah, his mom tells him to say hi to the freak for her. Jared reminds her that he doesn't insult her boyfriends, but she parrots all the times he's criticized her boyfriends for being crazy or addicts. In that moment, Jared remembers the nail gun, and he asks his mom if David ever got violent with her. Jared's mom says that David wanted someone demure, and when she looks away, Jared knows that David abused her. Jared thanks his mom for saving him the night David broke his ribs.

This exchange illustrates why Jared's relationship with his mom is so complex. Thanking her for saving him acknowledges that she uses her violence to protect Jared. But at the same time, his mom also brought additional violence into his life that she has to protect him from, and this blend of love and violence is deeply painful and confusing.



CHAPTER 33

The ape men get excited when Jared approaches the Jaksés' house because of Sarah's fireflies, which Jared can still see. As he walks in, Jared notices a "FOR SALE" sign on the Jaksés' front lawn. Jared asks if they're selling the house, and Sarah says yes. Mrs. Jaks explains that she got bad news from the doctor, and she wants to make sure that Mr. Jaks will be taken care of. Suddenly, Jared starts sobbing at the sadness and unfairness in life. Sarah starts to cry too, and she and Jared hold each other. As they calm down, Jared asks when they're leaving, and Sarah says soon. He tells her that he'll miss her, and Sarah tells him to wait on the end credits.

Jared continues to avoid confronting the magic in his life, despite the fact that it remains a constant presence. In addition, Jared's sadness reveals how valuable positive relationships like Sarah's and Mrs. Jaks's are for him, and how upsetting it is to lose them. The love that they gave him (excepting Sarah's occasional violence and self-harm) provided him with the crucial support that he lacks in his relationships with his parents.



The fireflies start to talk, explaining that one's existence suggests birth and even death, but Jared has no idea what they mean. Jared and Sarah go into the kitchen for tea. The fireflies continue to talk, explaining that human beings cannot reduce the universe to a single formula—transcendence is not only achieved with math. They explain that people are words and one's soul is a poem; mortal words cannot say the "infinite unsayable." Jared wonders how he can make the fireflies be quiet.

The fireflies hint at the idea that humans are misguided in their belief that they can make sense of or overcome the mysteries of the universe. There are many mysteries that are "infinite" and "unsayable" for humans, because they cannot comprehend all of the beauty in the world, or the fact that humanity's role in the universe is relatively small and insignificant. On the other hand, Jared's attempts to simply ignore the fireflies show that he's unwilling to even try to understand the magic and beauty around him; he simply sees these things as problems to ignore.



At that moment, someone knocks on the door for an open house. Sarah leaves, unable to handle giving another tour. The fireflies follow her out of the room and the ape men follow them. After the real estate agent comes through the kitchen with a family, Jared turns to Mrs. Jaks and tells her about when he popped out of his body after David hurt him. Mrs. Jaks explains that Jared was sleepwalking, and that she's glad he came to her when he was lost, because she would have been lost without him.

Here, Mrs. Jaks acknowledges how her relationship with Jared has changed as he's grown more mature. When Jared first came to Mrs. Jaks after David assaulted him, he needed her care. But over time, their dynamic reversed: Mrs. Jaks came to need him, and Jared was able to take on that responsibility because of the way his difficult family life prepared him to be selfless and mature.



The house sells by the end of the day. Mrs. Jaks's daughter-in-law, Dawn, drives in from Prince George to help Mrs. Jaks get ready for the move. As everyone gets ready for bed, Sarah and Jared curl up on the couch, and Jared tells Sarah that he loves her. When Sarah pauses and asks if he's saying that because he feels sorry for her, Jared tells her to pretend he didn't say anything. Sarah says that he's not the worst boyfriend in the world, and Jared replies that maybe they shouldn't talk. Sarah suggests that Jared go home, so he angrily storms out the door.

Outside on the dark street, Jared sees Baby waiting for him. She gallops towards him and he pets her head. His inner voice warns him that this isn't Baby, but he doesn't care. Suddenly, she runs away, and Jared follows her barks to the edge of the woods but stops before going in. He can feel himself being watched, and he realizes that Baby isn't acting like herself—she would never go into the woods at night. Baby yelps, and Jared lurches because she's in pain, but he can't move. Then Sarah walks out of the woods in her Princess Leia buns and dress. Her eyes are black in the moonlight, and she stops out of reach.

Sarah asks if Jared wants to make out and make up, but Jared tells her that he's looking for his dog. She explains that there's a dog in a trap that was snapping at her, so she didn't go near it. Jared realizes that this isn't Sarah—her fireflies aren't there, and she would never leave an animal in a trap. He wonders how someone could imitate Sarah and Baby so well, and he's angry that someone watched him to find out what would lure him into danger.

Drawing his gun, Jared says that what Fake Sarah is doing isn't funny—it's mean and hateful. He says he loved his dog, and Fake Sarah retorts that he loved his dog because he was her master—he only loves the beings that beg for food. She says that people are killing the world yet still wonder why other creatures hate them. Fake Sarah then shapeshifts into a river otter, and a pack of otters appears behind her.

Fake Sarah explains that Jared needs to be stopped, and he starts to back away. His inner voice says, "I'll be there as soon as I can" and tells Jared not to run into the woods. Jared backs up all the way to the **basement**, locking the door behind him as the river otters bang on the windows. Jared texts Nana Sophia to ask what she knows about river otters, and Nana Sophia immediately replies that she's coming to help.

Again, it makes sense that Jared is most willing to express his affection when he and Sarah are sharing this warm moment, because he feels that their relationship is safe and comfortable. This contrasts with the moments when Sarah wants to mix love and violence, which causes Jared to be less sure of their relationship.



Jared's readiness to believe that this is Baby—even though he's well aware that Baby is dead—is another example of his willingness to ignore the magic around him rather than trying to understand it. This ends up putting him in greater danger—as implied by the fact that he feels like he's being watched—suggesting that ignoring his problems and the magic in his life only puts him further out of control.



It's notable that whoever is trying to lure Jared uses Sarah, and especially Baby Killer, to elicit an emotional reaction. Jared misses his relationship with Baby Killer to the point that he goes looking for her, even though he logically knows that she's dead. With this, the book makes it clear that openly affectionate and unconditionally loving relationships, like the one Jared had with Baby, are deeply valuable.



As the river otters reveal themselves, their message becomes clear. They believe that human beings are destroying the world, and as such, magical beings and other animals are turning on humans in order to try and protect the environment.



Here, Jared starts to experience the fallout of having ignored the magic in his life (like his inner voice, which now clearly belongs to someone who is not Jared). He is now in imminent danger, as indicated by the voice's concern and Nana Sophia's extreme reaction to Jared asking about the river otters. They recognize what Jared does not: the need to deal with the problem quickly and directly rather than trying to ignore it.



CHAPTER 34

Despite Jared's protests that he's okay, Nana Sophia insists on flying in that afternoon. Jared is worried about the otters, but he's even more worried that Nana Sophia will bring up his plan to stay with her for the summer. He desperately wants to drink so that he doesn't have to think about any of this, but he knows there's no way to stop what's happening.

Jared gets dressed, straps on his gun, and goes upstairs. He tells his mom that Nana Sophia is coming, and she immediately gets angry, asking why he's talking to Sophia. Jared admits that it's kind of nuts, but that he asked Nana about river otters and she booked a plane. Jared's mom immediately freaks out and asks him what happened, and he's stunned that she's reacting this way. Jared's mom slaps him and asks if he saw someone he loved. He confirms that he saw Baby and Sarah, and Jared's mom curses.

Jared's mom says that the river otters are targeting Jared because he's having sex with a witch, and Jared asks his mom not to call Sarah names. Jared's mom explains that Sarah isn't stable magically, but Jared says that witches aren't real. Jared's mom then reveals that Sarah is a witch, Mrs. Jaks is a witch, and she's a witch herself. Jared is stunned, thinking that she must be insane, too. Believing in witches means a total shift in his understanding of the world.

Jared's mom also explains that Nana Sophia is a Halayt—a high chief medicine woman who deals with cannibals and ogres. When Jared is amazed at this information, Jared's mom pours vodka into her coffee and some for Jared as well, stunned at his ignorance. Jared asks why his mom didn't tell him, and his mom says that she tried to teach him protection spells when he was five, but he refused to listen. Jared asks if he's a witch, but his mom says that he has no ability whatsoever. Jared takes several swigs before asking if his dad is a witch, but Jared's mom doesn't answer.

Just as Jared is trying to avoid the problem with the river otters and convince Nana Sophia that he's fine, he also wants to avoid the problem of telling his mother that he's going to Nana Sophia's. As a result, he once again resorts to drinking alcohol as a means of escapism. Still, he is starting to recognize that avoiding his problems doesn't help him—it's more effective to confront issues head on.



Again, Jared starts to realize the negative consequences of ignoring the magical beings in his life, as even his mom (who is normally very tough and emotionless) starts to worry about the river otters threatening him. This further reinforces the idea that the best way to handle one's problems is to confront them, not to write them off—like Jared did for so long in attributing the visions to his drug use.



Jared expands on one of the reasons why confronting the problems in his life is so difficult: it requires a complete shift in his understanding of the world. But avoiding this change has only placed Jared in great danger with the otters who are trying to kill him, suggesting that even when it's difficult to accept reality, doing so is necessary to avoid even worse consequences.



Even as Jared and his mother realize that they have to deal with the river otters directly, they still use alcohol to cope with what is happening. This underscores the fact that they still haven't fully acknowledged that substance abuse doesn't solve problems—it only helps people avoid those problems.



In the silence, the ape guys crawl through the floors, and Jared's mom waves her hands, causing the men to evaporate. Jared is amazed, and his mom is surprised that Jared can see them, because he never has before. She says that she doesn't want to know where he and Sarah picked them up. Opening an ammo locker in her closet with shells and feathers, Jared's mom instructs him to get the emergency candles in the kitchen pantry. Just then, the landline rings, and Jared sees that it's the Jakses. He picks up and Sarah is crying, saying that Mrs. Jaks is on the floor and not breathing. Jared yells at Sarah to call 911 and runs out the door with no shoes. But as he goes around the corner, someone hits him in the head.

CHAPTER 35

Jared wakes up in a muddy cave with his ankles and wrists bound and tape over his mouth. His head aches, and he realizes that his gun is gone. In that moment, he remembers that the real Sarah would never have called him from the Jakses' landline. Jared shakes from the cold, and a sharp bone pricks his hand. He feels around for it and uses it to cut himself out of the duct tape on his wrists, then the tape around his head and ankles.

Tucking the sharp bone in his belt, Jared crawls around in the darkness, trying to follow the sound of a nearby river. He touches tons of bones—of cats, dogs, and even humans. The tunnel he's crawling along narrows, until he slides into a small pool. He pulls himself out, but he can't see anything. He hears a woman's voice calling him a tasty little worm that can lure in some fish. Then, suddenly, he hears things moving toward him. Hands grip him, and teeth sink into his side. He grabs the sharp bone and stabs out randomly, fighting until the bodies weigh him down and he weeps and bleeds.

Suddenly, a lighter flicks on, and Jared can see creatures that are part human, part otters. Fake Sarah lights a torch nearby, and the otters keep a tight grip on Jared and lift his left foot. One of them licks his baby toe and bares its teeth, and Jared begs them to stop. Ignoring him, the otter rips through his skin and gnaws his toe off as Jared screams. Fake Sarah then takes the lighter and runs it over the raw flesh. Jared wants to pass out or die, convulsing as his skin roasts until Fake Sarah stops.

Jared's mom's actions illustrate how unnecessary and ineffective it was for Jared to avoid his problems, as she easily makes the ape men disappear and sets out to protect him from the river otters. This suggests that if Jared had been more willing to accept magic and the danger that he was in, he might have been able to handle it earlier and avoid some of the problems that he is now encountering. Again, this reinforces the importance of facing one's problems in order to regain control of one's life.



Here, Jared starts to face the consequences of ignoring the magical occurrences in his life, as he winds up bound and gagged in a muddy cave. The book suggests that had he consulted his mother earlier, he might not be facing these dire consequences, because his mom could have protected him.



The voice talking about Jared as a tasty little worm who can catch fish implies that the otters are trying to use Jared as bait. Thus, not only has Jared endangered himself—subjecting himself to this torture—by putting off accepting the magic in his life, but he has also potentially endangered people he cares about. This again reinforces the danger in avoiding one's problems instead of trying to confront them directly.



The fact that Jared loses a toe to the river otters goes even further than hinting at the danger of avoiding one's problems: it explicitly demonstrates the painful and permanent consequences of doing so.



Fake Sarah says that Jared has disappointed them—they thought he had power, but he doesn't taste powerful. He's still useful, though, and Jared realizes that they're going to try to lure his mom to them. He tries to tell them that she won't come for him, and they ask if they should just eat him now. Jared tries to stall by bringing up the Anthropocene. The otters murmur, saying that the world is burning—humans are taking all the fish, and so humans are the only thing left to eat. Jared tries to distract them by telling them that they should get the factory animals to join their cause. They realize that Jared is just trying to stall, so Fake Sarah orders the otters to bite off all his fingers and toes.

Suddenly, time stops, and the otters freeze. A voice in Jared's head says, "Hello, son." Jared frees himself from the otter-humans and falls to the cave floor, vomiting. He crawls away toward the entrance of the cave and finds himself on a riverbank. Jared calls out, and the voice says that he's accelerated them in a temporal pocket, but Jared needs to come closer. Jared sees an old, dark car parked nearby and goes toward it, but the voice says to look up, and he sees a raven—Wee'git—in a tree. Jared briefly sees himself through Wee'git's eyes before shifting back into his own head, and he tells Wee'git not to do that.

Wee'git explains that Jared needs to shift out of his form and fly away, but Jared insists that he doesn't have magic. Jared gets into the car and feels himself getting colder and more tired—his adrenaline is wearing off, and he's still bleeding badly. When Jared asks Wee'git why he came, Wee'git says that he's here to save Jared.

When Jared asks Wee'git if he's been listening and watching him all this time, Wee'git tries to tell Jared that there isn't much time and that they have to leave, but Jared refuses. Jared points out that the voice called him son, but Phil is his dad. The voice explains that a DNA test wouldn't pick up the truth. Jared asks how long Wee'git has been watching him, and Wee'git says that he's been watching since Jared's first act of magic—when Jared shifted out of body.

The topic of the Anthropocene comes up once again, as the otters point out that humans are the cause of mass environmental destruction. This angers creatures in both the natural world and in the magical realm where Jared now finds himself. The fact that the otters go after Jared in revenge—even though Jared himself may not have done anything to hurt them—suggests that all people are complicit in environmental destruction, and that this destruction will ultimately cause humanity's own downfall.



In this moment, Jared's inner voice finally confirms that he is Wee'git, and that Jared is his son. With this revelation, the book again suggests that if Jared had been more open to understanding his inner voice, or to engaging with Wee'git during one of the many times that he approached Jared, Jared might not have wound up in such grave danger.



Jared's lack of acceptance has not only left him in the dark about his identity up to this point, but it has also prevented him from protecting himself. Whereas Jared and his mother doesn't believe that Jared has any magical ability, Wee'git's assurance that Jared can transform into something else suggests that Jared could have taken advantage of his power if he had been more open to it.



Wee'git brings up another moment in which Jared denied his magical ability to his detriment. After popping out of his body, Jared believed that he was in a dream. But had he understood his magical capabilities in that moment, he might have been able to harness that power and avoid being captured by the river otters. This again reinforces the importance of facing one's problems in order to overcome them.



Wee'git shows Jared a vision of himself holding Mrs. Jaks's hand as he walked to the ambulance. Jared gets angry, asking Wee'git sarcastically if he had a good time watching the worst moment of his life and doing nothing. Jared asks where he was all this time, if he is Jared's father. The voice says that he's been dead—Jared's mom killed him. Jared realizes that Wee'git has only shown up now because Jared has magic—if he were just human, it wouldn't be worth it. Wee'git says that Jared is displacing his anger with David, particularly because Wee'git is there trying to help Jared.

Wee'git tells Jared that he can do and be anything he wants to be. Jared disagrees, saying that he's human and that he can't do anything magical. He'd rather be "otter chow" than stay with Wee'git. Wee'git tries to reason with Jared, but time is running out—the river starts to flow again, and the otter people start to stream out of the cage.

The otter people shove Jared out of the way, intent on getting to Wee'git. When Jared looks up, Wee'git has transformed into an otter, and the otters bite and claw at one another as they try to figure out which one of them is Wee'git. Wee'git tells Jared to run, and Jared limps down the logging road. Just then, ape men start loping toward him, and Jared sees his mom's truck approach. Jared's mom hops out of the passenger side and lobs grenades toward the river where the otters are, and then she helps Jared to the truck. She vows to get revenge on the river otters.

CHAPTER 36

At the hospital, Jared explains to the nurse that he got his foot stuck in an otter den and then burned it in a campfire trying to run away. Jared's mom gives him some pain meds that make him numb and texts Nana Sophia that Jared is okay. Jared asks if Nana Sophia is really his Nana, but Jared's mom ignores him. Jared asks why his mom tried to kill Wee'git, but she doesn't answer. When Jared's mom asks if Wee'git promised to show him the world, Jared explains that he refused to go with Wee'git. Jared then dozes in the wheelchair until the doctor arrives.

This backstory adds another dimension to why Jared has had to take on such responsibility in his life. Not only was Phil an absent father, but so was Wee'git. Jared's criticism shows that Wee'git hasn't been fully responsible, because he didn't care about Jared before he showed magical capability. As a result, Jared was navigating the world with no support, and as a result, he had shoulder more responsibility than other kids his age.



Even as Jared is dealing with the repercussions of ignoring the magic in his life, he still struggles to accept this part of himself. Jared's statement that he would rather be "otter chow," as well as his choice to avoid Wee'git, demonstrate that he still has a long way to go to accept his problems rather than run away from them.



Although Jared is critical of Wee'git's absence from his life, Wee'git still tries to protect him and even sacrifices himself. This expression of love is somewhat similar to the way that Jared's mom tries to protect him with violence.



Jared avoided confronting Wee'git at all costs, and it's clear that his mom has the same impulse. But avoiding talking about their history created problems for both of them, as it left Jared vulnerable to magical beings that he didn't understand. Thus, Jared's mom's decision to keep Jared's family history from him reinforces the issue with avoiding one's problems rather than confronting them directly.



After the doctor stitches Jared up, he and his mom return home, where Nana Sophia is waiting in the **basement**, surrounded by the ape men. She apologizes for not coming earlier. Nana Sophia takes some of Jared's blood into a bowl with weeds and lights it on fire. As she does this, Jared sees a monster under her skin with a terrible beak. Smoke rises from the bowl, and the ape men crawl up the smoke and disappear into the ceiling. Then, Nana Sophia warns Jared not to wander through the spirit world before leaving him to get some rest.

Very late that night, Sarah and her fireflies come to the door. Sarah asks Jared if he's still mad before noticing the gauze and the stitches. When she asks what happened, Jared tells her the truth. Jared acknowledges that he sounds nuts, but he can still see Sarah's fireflies. When Sarah gets excited, Jared wonders if she's crazy, too. The fireflies correct him, saying that they're ultra-dimensional beings. The fireflies then say that Sarah has unique quantum mechanical behavior, and that when she touched them, they could understand human language and culture. Jared tries to explain all this, but Sarah simply thinks that Jared is making fun of her in revenge for her not saying "I love you" back, and she storms off.

In the morning, Nana Sophia returns with coffee. She and Jared eat breakfast in the kitchen while Jared's mom sleeps in the living room. Nana Sophia says that she didn't realize things had gotten so bad in the house. She says that it'll be better for Jared to stay with her while he's healing. Jared knows it would be easy to go with her, but he also knows that he has to tell her what Wee'git told him about his identity.

Jared explains to Nana Sophia that Wee'git was with the otters, and that Wee'git said you can't tell Tricksters apart at the DNA level. The thing under Nana Sophia's skin starts to raise its beak and cry out, its eyes wild. Jared's mom comes into the kitchen, explaining that she told Phil that Jared wasn't his son, but he didn't believe her. Her sister Mavis told Jared's mom that she was unfit to raise a child without a husband, and so she had to marry Phil or risk losing Jared. Then, a red cloud comes through the ceiling, and Nana's eyes are wild—the monster under her skin becomes a pterodactyl. Jared thinks that having Nana Sophia want to kill him is worse than almost being eaten by the river otters.

When Jared asks if he's a human or a freak, Nana Sophia says that he's the son of a Trickster and a whore. Jared concludes that he and Nana Sophia aren't related, and he starts to cry at losing his one lifeline, the one person who could make his life less crappy. Sobbing, he thinks that he hates himself and his life. In response, Nana Sophia coldly writes him a check to make up for the money Phil owes him and leaves without hugging him.

Nana Sophia's short ritual provides a clear contrast with Jared's actions. Whereas Jared simply hoped the ape men would go away, they only increased in number and attracted other creatures to his home. Nana Sophia, on the other hand, acknowledged that they were there, and as such, she was able to resolve the problem. This underscores the idea that the only way to regain control over one's life is to face one's problems head on.



This passage reveals another reason why Jared's avoidance of magic has only created more problems in his life. Because he didn't believe Sarah earlier when she talked to him about her magic, she now finds it hard to believe that he's actually taking it seriously. In fact, Jared still has some hesitation about fully accepting the magic in his life, even though he can see the fireflies, because he believes that Sarah might be crazy for seeing them. Even after his experience with the river otters, Jared still hasn't fully learned to accept magic.



It is only here that Jared starts to regain some control over his own life, taking steps toward self-acceptance and honestly confronting his problems by realizing that he needs to tell Nana Sophia about his true identity.



Jared is more upset about Nana Sophia wanting to kill than he was about almost being eaten by river otters, which illuminates how valuable this relationship is to him. Whereas Nana Sophia always gave him seemingly unconditional love, the fact that this love has given way to a violent, threatening animal makes it no different from what he experiences from his mother (who loves him, but who can also be violent with him).



Jared's sobs again reflect how valuable a loving relationship characterized by affection, rather than violent passion, was for him. Now, it's extremely difficult for Jared to cope with losing the one relationship in his life that seemed purely good.



After Nana Sophia leaves, Jared's mom comments that he almost got them killed for the second time that week. Jared asks if this means he's a monster, but Jared's mom assures he's just human—and a dumb one, at that. If he were a Trickster, he'd be powerful, and it's very hard to hide magical abilities like that.

The next day, Jared cashes Nana Sophia's check and takes the bus to Phil's apartment in Terrace. When Jared arrives, Phil glares at him, but Jared simply thanks him for being a good dad and for taking Jared and his mom in. He gives Phil the envelope, and Phil says that he'll still pay Jared the money he owes him. Before Jared leaves, Phil tells him to take everything his mom says with a grain of salt—she has an imaginary world where she's a big powerful witch and she's being chased by mythical creatures. Jared misses being that “naïve,” and he says goodbye. On the bus home, Jared thinks about writing Nana Sophia but decides against it—no one likes being reminded that someone else played them.

CHAPTER 37

For the next few days, Jared stays home, even trading rooms with one of the tenants so he can move back into his **room** upstairs. Jared climbs into his mom's bed while Richie is out, and she assures him that she hexed the otters—it's her only real magical talent. Jared then asks if she actually tried to kill Wee'git. His mom explains that she shot Wee'git in the head, stuffed him in a trunk, and pushed it into the ocean because he messed with Anita and then with her. But, she says, it's impossible to kill Tricksters; you can only put them out of commission for a while. Jared wishes that he could watch his mom try to kill Wee'git the next time Wee'git comes back.

Later that day, a moving truck arrives to pack up the Jaks'es house. Jared goes over to their place and gives Sarah a hug, and she tells him that she's not okay. Jared notices that the fireflies are silent. He wishes he couldn't see them—he just wants his normal human sight back. Inside, Mrs. Jaks starts crying, and Mr. Jaks looks terrified. Jared takes Mr. Jaks to the bathroom to clean him up and calm him down, but Jared doesn't know what to say to make it better.

Jared's magical abilities remain ambiguous: Wee'git believes that Jared isn't entirely human, while Jared's mom believes that he is. While Jared is more accepting of his relationship to Wee'git, he still hasn't fully come around to understanding his magical abilities and trying to take control of them.



Even though Jared is still working through his relationship to magic, his characterization of Phil as “naïve” for not believing in witches illustrates that Jared understands he can no longer simply dismiss the magic in his life. Thus, even if he isn't fully engaging in magic, he has at least come to accept its existence. Meanwhile, Jared again demonstrates his maturity in continuing to care of his father: even though he now knows that his father took advantage of his help, he gives him money anyway. Even when most of his family hates him, Jared still feels a responsibility to care for the adults in his life.



Jared's move back to his upstairs bedroom is symbolic, as having a real room reflects Jared and his mother's improved relationship. Whereas before she relegated him to the basement and ended up destroying his space in anger, now she is trying to support and take care of him while he heals from the river otters' attack. However, this passage also illustrates that even people who have supernatural abilities—like Jared's mom—can avoid their problems to their detriment. Jared's mom shot Wee'git in the head despite knowing that he would return and cause havoc—again reinforcing the idea that the only way to regain control of one's life is to address one's problems, not put them off.



This exchange with Sarah and the Jaks'es shows how Jared's wish to not be able to see the fireflies is a direct extension of his desire to avoid his problems. He doesn't feel like he's in control of his life, and he doesn't know how to fix anything: the Jaks'es moving, Sarah's sorrow, or the magical visions. As such, he'd just rather just avoid his problems.



Later, Sarah, Jared, and Dawn are sitting in the living room while the Jakses sleep. Sarah tells Jared that Sarah's mom is coming the next day to bring her home—she doesn't want Sarah to live on the reserve. Dawn goes out to get them dinner, and Sarah cuts Jared's hair before examining his missing toe. After she rewraps his gauze, she runs her hands along his legs, trying to avoid the cuts on his body. Sarah and Jared then grab some alcohol and start to drink, and Jared tells Sarah that he'll miss her. Sarah again tells him to stop rolling the end credits, saying that they'll visit each other.

Jared and Sarah kiss and touch each other, and they position themselves on the bed to avoid his stitches. They start to move together, and Jared feels pleasure building up—he even hears music. Opening his eyes, the fireflies form a figure eight above his head and he sees that Sarah's skin is shredding off and floating away. Sarah is amazed and glowing, realizing that Jared was telling the truth about the fireflies. Jared sees his skin shredding, too, and he stumbles off the bed and pulls on his clothes, terrified.

Jared goes into the kitchen, and the shreds sink back into his body. Sarah comes out and asks him to come back to bed, saying that she never felt anything like that before. Jared explains that what they're doing is shredding them apart, but Sarah says that they're joining. Jared tells Sarah that he's scared, and he refuses to come back to bed.

Just then, the fireflies spring at Jared's head. He hears a voice talking about magic, about asteroids soaring through the air, and about Tricksters. He can see visions of a fire on a beach, a spirit peeking out from behind a tree, and a longhouse in the mountains spewing terrible red smoke that smells like burning flesh. When Jared snaps out of these visions, the fireflies are amazed, realizing that he isn't quite human because he has all these memories.

Sarah puts her hand on Jared's forehead, asking to see what he sees. At that moment, Fake Sarah's ghost comes through the wall, putting her own hand through Jared's forehead. The ghosts of the other people crawl through the walls, and Jared pulls away, stepping outside. He limps home with Sarah following him, the ghosts following her, and the fireflies swirling over everything. When Jared gets home, his mom sees the ghosts and smirks, satisfied that her curses worked. Jared's mom tells Sarah to go home, asking to have a family moment, and Sarah looks forlorn as she leaves.

Here, Jared again uses alcohol to numb his pain—both the physical pain of his stitches and cuts and the emotional pain of losing Sarah. This shows that he's still trying to maintain some control over his life by avoiding his problems, even though this won't actually solve anything.



The way Jared immediately reacts with fear and staggers off the bed again illustrates that he's unwilling to fully engage with magic. He would rather avoid it than confront what is happening, because he worries about the danger that the magical realm might pose. But as the book has illustrated up to this point, trying to avoid that danger will not actually save him from it.



Unlike Jared, Sarah is actually trying to engage with her magical abilities—she even points out that the experience could be positive, whereas Jared views it only as something fearful and dangerous.



As the fireflies rediscover some of Jared's buried memories, much of what the voice says is pulled directly from the previous chapters that talked about magic and the interconnectedness of all beings. This hints that Jared is starting to understand more about the role of magic in his life, as well as about humanity's role in the universe. Yet he still isn't able to engage with any of this, because he is so terrified of what it means to be able to transcend time and space. He still has a long way to go to fully understand his connection with the magical realm, rather than simply waving it off.



Because Jared is unable to understand what's going on, he simply removes himself from the situation and walks home—again illustrating his impulse to simply avoid magic when he feels he can't control it. On the other hand, the fact that Jared's mom's curses worked shows that engaging with magic and confronting problems directly does solve them.



When Richie returns home that evening, a grizzly bear follows him, shifting into the bedroom wall. Jared's mom smacks the bear's nose, and it disappears through the wall. Jared's mom tells Jared to get some sleep, but he's haunted by the vision of the longhouse and the acrid smoke.

The next day, Jared stays home from school and ignores texts from Sarah—his mom won't let Sarah into the house, and she wants to keep Jared close. That night, his mom offers him a large white pill, but Jared refuses it. He quickly falls asleep, and when he wakes up, he hears sirens wailing down the street. Jared's mom looks out of the curtain and says that it's Sarah. When Jared tries to get up, he sees the ambulance take off down the street. His mom holds him, preventing him from following after her and telling him that he's done enough.

CHAPTER 38

The next morning, Jared knocks on the Jaks's door. Dawn and Mrs. Jaks tell him that Sarah cut herself while she was high on magic mushrooms, but she'll be okay. Jared helps them clean the blood off the kitchen floor and table. After they clean, Jared makes chicken soup for the Jaks's. They all spend the rest of the day staring at the TV, stunned.

Jared's mom gets him out of finals by faking a family death, and Jared gets Dylan to take him back to school as the term winds down. When kids go quiet as Jared approaches, he knows they found out about Sarah. Jared goes to his locker and realizes that at some point, Sarah hot-glued flies with painted yellow butts to his locker, which looks crazy. He empties his locker as quickly as possible and then returns to the truck with Dylan. Dylan tries to comfort Jared by saying he also had a girl try to kill herself for his attention, telling him that feeling guilty won't do Sarah any good. Before dropping Jared off, Dylan offers to let him stay at his house any time.

That night, Jared's mom brings in a TV dinner to Jared's **bedroom**. She asks how the "nut job" is, and Jared asks his mom to not call Sarah names. But he realizes that his mom is trying to be nice in her own way, and he thanks her for dinner. Jared's mom says that the dinner wasn't even on sale, which Jared confirms is real love. Jared's mom grabs him in a headlock, saying, "I fucking love you, you sarcastic little shit," and Jared shouts "Hallmark!" in response.

Again, just as Nana Sophia easily dismissed the ape men, it is easy for Jared's mom to deal with the grizzly bear because she confronts it directly. But because Jared doesn't understand magic and refuses to engage with it, he is haunted by its possibilities, suggesting once more that avoiding one's problems doesn't actually solve them.



Here, Jared gets an even more severe lesson in the danger of avoiding one's problems. Even though Jared doesn't know exactly what happened yet, his mom's statement implies that Jared likely had something to do with the fact that Sarah wound up in an ambulance. This implies that Jared's unwillingness to face his magical abilities, or to help Sarah engage with hers, had very dangerous consequences.



Here, Jared more fully recognizes the consequences of walking out on Sarah, as avoiding his problems has only caused more harm to her. In addition, Sarah's attempts to use drugs to solve her inability to connect with magic also ended up hurting more than helping her. Thus, both Jared and Sarah learn that trying to avoid problems through escapism only puts a person further out of control.



As Jared returns to school for the first time since the otter incident, the book reminds readers that Jared has experienced a tremendous amount of loss in the past few days. The complexity of his relationships his mom, Nana Sophia, Wee'git, the magical world, and now Sarah provides him with a maturity that drastically outpaces his peers. This revisits the idea that teenagers who grow up with a dysfunctional family dynamic tend to have far greater burdens than those who do not.



This passage, which hearkens back to Jared's earlier sarcastic remark that his mom should write Hallmark cards, demonstrates that there is real love underlying Jared and his mom's relationship. But because it's mixed with the potential for violence, like his mom cursing at him and grabbing him in a headlock, it still isn't as healthy or uncomplicated as a relationship based solely in love.



The next day, Jared knocks on the Jaks'es door, and a trim, dark-haired woman answers—Jared figures that this is Sarah's mom. When Jared asks for Sarah, her mom says that she's resting, and that Sarah needs some space. She asks if Jared gave Sarah the drugs; when Jared says no, she comments critically that Jared didn't stop Sarah from doing drugs. Jared accuses Sarah's mom of blaming him for what happened, and he points out that she sent her daughter to take care of her dying parents, and that Sarah broke under the pressure. Sarah's mom asks him to leave, shutting and locking the door behind him.

When Jared walks back into his house, his mom is yelling at the phone, daring Sarah's mom to call the cops and saying that if Sarah's mom were her mom, she would try to kill herself too. Jared's mom starts to tear up, touched that Jared is starting to grow a backbone—unlike his dad, she adds. She says that she's proud of Jared, and he jokes they can hold up a liquor store for the family bonding.

Later, Dylan invites Jared to Gruchy's Beach, where 50 drunken teenagers are partying. Jared watches the fire on the beach, feeling lonely. He texts Crashpad, and they make plans to watch *The Walking Dead* the next day. At that moment, Ebony comes over. She apologizes for the video, but Jared thanks her for making him more popular. Ebony asks if Jared is still baking, but Jared says they probably shouldn't go into business together. When Ebony asks if he wants to leave, Jared goes over and asks Dylan if it's all right if he goes off with Ebony. Dylan just shrugs. Ebony drives Jared back to his house, and they stand outside talking about their respective years in school.

Just then, Sarah walks over in her Leia outfit. She tells Ebony that Jared isn't going to have sex with her, so she should find someone else. Ebony replies by telling Sarah to try not to kill herself with her grandparents watching. They trade more barbs until Jared tries to calm them down, thanking Ebony for the ride. At that moment, Sarah's mom creeps down the street in her car to come pick Sarah up—until Jared's mom appears on the porch with a paintball gun, firing off a round at Sarah's mom's car. Jared calls at her to stop.

As Jared turns back to Sarah, she tells him that she loves him, but Jared says that he can't do this anymore—she almost died, and he had to clean up her blood. Sarah says that the sex they had together was like being alive for the first time. When she asks if Jared can still see her fireflies, Jared just tells her to let it go.

Although Sarah's mother is blaming Jared for what happened to her daughter, Jared points out that she shirked her responsibilities, both in taking care of Sarah and in taking care of Mr. and Mrs. Jaks. As a result, Sarah had to take on that responsibility, again illustrating how adults who don't fulfill their parental responsibility often end up passing that responsibility onto their children.



This passage provides more insight into Jared's relationship with his mom: her affection is often contingent on Jared being tough or even violent, as he points out. This is what makes their relationship so emotionally painful at times, because Jared tends to be uncomfortable with aggression.



This moment illustrates how Jared has become even more mature than his peers due to the hardship he's experienced. His feelings of loneliness in a group of 50 teenagers suggests that he doesn't feel like he can relate to their comparatively fun, carefree lives anymore. Meanwhile, the image of Jared watching the fire on the beach recalls the same image when the fireflies saw his memories. This suggests that Jared does have some magical knowledge of different times and places—both the past and the future.



Jared has to yell at his mom not to shoot Sarah's mom's car with a paintball gun. This reversal of the typical parent-child dynamic shows how he still has to be the responsible one out of the two of them.



Although Sarah is more willing to say that she loves Jared, Jared struggles to return her love. This is because he has a difficult time dealing with the violence in their relationship—not violence toward him, but the violence Sarah inflicts on herself, which is confusing and painful for Jared. Additionally, Jared is still trying to avoid the magic in their lives, but this alienates him from Sarah. This once again suggests that avoiding one's problems only causes more pain.



Back inside, Jared's mom comments that Sarah is growing on her, but Jared says that that means little considering that Sarah is off to rehab in the morning. Jared's mom then suggests they run through some protection spells, but Jared says that he's done with magic. Jared's mom replies that he may be done with magic, but magic isn't done with him.

Early in the morning, Jared wakes and goes to the window, where he sees Sarah and her fireflies looking up at him from the sidewalk. He waves, and she waves back. They watch each other until Sarah's mother drives up, and Sarah gets into the car and drives away. That night, Jared drinks a lot, and he finds himself crying in Mr. Jaks's lap in the Jakses' kitchen. Mr. Jaks strokes him soothingly, and Jared wipes his nose and apologizes.

Jared begs the Jakses not to leave, and Mrs. Jaks tells Jared that they've all had a hard year. Mrs. Jaks says that she's not afraid of dying, but she's worried about Mr. Jaks being alone; she wishes that life were fairer. Jared tells her he's going to miss her. Mrs. Jaks says that she knows everything hurts, but that Jared shouldn't drink his life away—he's a good boy, and she wishes good things for him.

CHAPTER 39

A party is starting in Jared's living room, and a grizzly bear rambles through the kitchen, unnoticed by everyone except Jared and his mom. Another ghost—a white woman with dirty-blond hair, approaches Jared and asks him to tell her daughter that she was killed. Jared's mom reaches through the woman, causing her to evaporate. Jared's mom then asks Jared how he's doing, and he feels shaky. She again asks him to learn some protection spells, but he refuses—he has trouble caring about it. Jared wonders if he should just drop out of school and bake cookies.

Jared goes up to his **room**, and Dylan and Martina Yelan come in an hour later to get high. They make out on Jared's desk, and Jared starts to miss Sarah. Shortly after, they leave to head out to the lake, and then Alex Gunborg and his Goth friends come to Jared's room and give him beer, so he lets them drink in his room. The bear doesn't like this, so it puts its head through the wall to try and sleep. As Jared drinks, Alex comments that Jared has "the life."

Here, Jared's mom makes the point that Jared's avoidance of magic doesn't guarantee that magic won't interfere with his life. In a way, in trying to avoid magic, Jared only spirals further out of control. Instead, the only way to regain control over his life is to address problems directly.



Even though Jared believes that breaking things off with Sarah and avoiding the magic that surrounds her will protect him, in reality, avoiding the magic in his life has only added to his pain. In turn, Jared tries to escape from that pain using alcohol, but the book illustrates that this reliance on escapism doesn't actually solve Jared's problems—it only hurts him more.



Mrs. Jaks's advice that Jared shouldn't drink his life away gets at the heart of Jared's problem with alcohol: too often, he uses it as a form of escapism. Her warning suggests that using alcohol in this way will only diminish the amount of control a person has over their life.



Just as his mom predicted, ignoring the magical world doesn't allow Jared to escape it. In this way, the book doesn't tie up Jared's story neatly, as he still has trouble accepting and combatting the problems that he is now facing.



Alex Gunborg thinks that Jared has "the life" because he can drink in his room, which illustrates the stark contrast between Jared and other kids his age. Jared is only able to drink in his room because his parents neglect him and leave him to his own devices, something that doesn't seem to cross Alex's mind. Jared has faced dire problems in the past year—including many that stem from substance abuse—which alienates him from his peers' more innocent and lighthearted concerns.



Later, Jared winds up at the lake, and Dylan throws him off the dock. Jared sinks, and for a second he's back in the cave, thrashing in the water. The otter bites have healed, and he doesn't miss his toe anymore, but as he treads water, he wants to get drunk—to get out of his head and never go back in.

Dylan drops Jared in front of his house, and Jared looks over at the Jaks, remembering all the times he was there. At that moment, Jwa'sins drives down the street in her burgundy Caddy, asking if Jared wants something to eat. Watching the monster under her skin, Jared agrees. Jwa'sins drives Jared to a Dairy Queen and tells him that Wee'git is her brother. She explains that Jared is one of 532 children, and that they've been alive since the mountains were lumps of gravel. She says that she just wants as normal a life as she can manage.

After ordering Jared a chocolate dip, Jwa'sins asks if Jared has any questions for her, and he says no. She's surprised, as he was very curious when they met the last time. Jwa'sins tells Jared that he hurt Wee'git's feelings—he has a lot of children to watch, after all. As they get their order, Jared starts to sober up, and Jwa'sins takes him to a nearby park. Jared eats a bit of the ice cream and then hurls in the bushes. Jwa'sins says that it seems like Jared is in a lot of pain, and she offers to show him a place where he can find peace.

Jwa'sins takes Jared to a nearby church basement, where people are joining an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Jared is annoyed at being there, but he doesn't have anywhere else to go, so he grabs coffee and stays. The stories are sad—the people at the meeting are broken, like he is, but they aren't trying to fake a good time. When the leader asks for first-timers, Jwa'sins makes Jared stand, and he introduces himself, saying that he's drunk and doesn't know if he's supposed to be there—but the leader assures him that he's welcome.

As Jared starts to leave, Mr. Wilkinson approaches him and shakes Jared's hand. He says that he's proud of Jared for taking such a big step, and Jared starts to cry, feeling like a phony and a loser. Mr. Wilkinson takes Jared home and gives him a recovery chip. The party is now in full swing, and Jared goes to his **room** and looks at the chip's words: "One day at a time" and "Recovery...begins with one sober hour."

Even toward the end of the book, Jared hasn't fully learned how to confront his problems without resorting to escapism. The fact that he can't get over his problems indicates that he needs to find a different strategy to deal with them, other than simply getting drunk.



Like Jared, Jwa'sins is also avoiding magic to some extent, as she wants as normal a life as possible. And yet, as she noted earlier, not using magic has made the monster under her skin angry, again suggesting that avoiding one's problems will only make them worse.



Although Mrs. Jaks alluded to Jared's substance abuse in Chapter 38, Jwa'sins is the first person to explicitly spell out that Jared's coping mechanism—drinking—is only adding to his pain. Instead of drinking to avoid his problems, regaining control of his life requires abandoning the escapism that he has relied on for so long.



In noting that the other people at the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting are broken like he is—but that they aren't trying to hide it—Jared recognizes that a key part of dealing with one's problems is admitting them and not trying to escape them or put a veneer over them. Instead, the book suggests, the solution is to confront them directly rather than avoid them in this manner.



Jared's interaction with Mr. Wilkinson is a turning point for him, as he wants make Mr. Wilkinson proud. The only way to do so, Jared acknowledges, is to avoid the alcohol that has caused his life to spiral out of control. The chip's message becomes especially important as Jared returns to the same party that was going on earlier. Whereas before he chose to get drunk, here, he is choosing to spend his time differently—and in doing so, he may be able to regain control of his life.



CHAPTER 40

Jared writes to Anita Moody, saying that his mom told him about Anita's time in a sanatorium, and he explains that he thinks she's tough for going through what she did. He tells her that he met Wee'git and Jwa'sins, and he doesn't really want anything to do with Wee'git. He says that he wants to visit, and he thanks Anita for praying for him and his mom.

A few days later, Jared comes home to a party and finds a couple making out on his bed. He kicks them out and opens his textbook. He's discovered how much time he has now that he's not getting drunk and recovering from hangovers—he's finished his homework and still has hours of time left. Jared thinks about attending another meeting, even though he already went to one that morning.

At that moment, Jared's mom comes into his **room** and slams his textbook shut, saying that she wants her son back. She calls him judgmental and self-righteous, asking if he wants her to stop drinking and be a good girl—but Jared assures her that his sobriety has nothing to do with her. Jared's mom shoves him, frustrated that he thinks she's better than her. She tips his desk chair over, throws his textbook against the wall, and hits him. Then, Richie comes in and asks Jared's mom to come downstairs, breaking up the fight.

Soon after this, Jared gets a job at a Dairy Queen, and he's glad to have money and a place to hang out after school. Dylan and the other kids he partied with are ignoring him now that he's clean, while the good kids are nervous about being around someone who attends Alcoholics Anonymous. So, Jared hangs out with George, the only person who will still be friends with him. At lunch, Jared thanks George for his friendship and his food, until George tells Jared to stop being "emo."

Jared gets a letter back from Anita Moody, who writes that she was happy to get his letter and that he's welcome to visit her whenever he wants. She warns him to be careful about Jwa'sins, explaining that Jwa'sins likely wants something from him. Anita is sorry for how she treated Jared, and she sends him and his mom love, thoughts, and prayers.

Even though Jared still has a tough time accepting the magic in his life, he is coming to terms with his identity and his family history. Even though he has lost his relationship with Nana Sophia, choosing to renew his relationship with Anita shows that Jared is no longer running from his problems (like Anita's hostility toward him). Instead, he is trying to face them directly.



After getting sober, Jared starts to experience the benefits of not trying to escape his everyday struggles. As a result, he is able to do his homework and spend his time as he chooses—showing how facing his problems head on helps Jared regain control of his life.



Even though Jared is finding empowerment in sobriety, this process is straining his and his mother's relationship. The fact that she takes this as a personal affront and starts to get violent with Jared underscores her immaturity—but it also highlights how Jared can control his attitude and actions, while his mother is seemingly unable to do so.



Jared continues to experience the benefits of getting sober rather than relying on escapism. Not only can he get a legal job (unlike selling marijuana cookies), but he is then able to choose better friends to hang out with. Even though George teases Jared for being sentimental here, it's clear that this has become Jared's strongest friendship. Together, these positive changes show how Jared's newfound approach to problems is improving his life overall.



In the novel's final passage, Anita's response ties this book into its sequel, Trickster Drift. Their letter-based conversation hints that just because Jared may want to avoid the magical realm doesn't necessarily mean that the magical realm is done with him. This puts a final point on the idea that only by addressing his problems will Jared be able to fully regain control of his life—and though he has found this control in his sobriety, he has yet to fully confront the magic in his life.





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